Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway
(Reservation No. 360)
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-697

HABS
DC
WASH,
638-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
AND REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS
DC
WASH
632-

ROCK CREEK AND POTOMAC PARKWAY
(Reservation No. 360)
HABS No. DC-697

Location: Extends 2.5 miles along Rock Creek valley and the Potomac waterfront from the south border of the National Zoological Park to the north boundary of West Potomac Park

Construction Date: Authorized by Congress 14 March 1913; principal construction 1923-1936

Designer: The parkway's extended design and development period makes it hard to apportion credit to any one individual. As the landscape architecture member of the Senate Park Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., articulated the basic outline of the design and supervised its development by a series of landscape architects employed by the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. These included William T. Partridge, James G. Langdon, Irving W. Payne, and Thomas C. Jeffers.

Present Owner: National Park Service-National Capital Region, Department of the Interior

Present Use: Serves dual purpose as local park and scenic motor road restricted to non-commercial traffic

Significance: Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway is significant for its role in the development of Washington, for its status as one of the best-preserved examples of the earliest stage of motor parkway development, and for its physical design, which combines landscape architecture, engineering, and architecture to provide an attractive and useful local park and commuter artery. The parkway played a significant role in the McMillan Commission's 1901-02 plan for the improvement of Washington's parks and public buildings. It was designed to replace a polluted river valley with a picturesque drive and bridle path linking the two main elements of the city's park system. By the time the parkway was completed, the rising popularity of the automobile and rapid suburban growth transformed it into a major commuter route. The parkway's narrow, twisting roadway, with its abrupt entrance roads, long stretches of undivided two-way traffic, and monumental crossing bridges, reflects the earliest era of motor parkway design. The parkway maintains a high degree of historical integrity despite considerable pressure to modernize the roadway during the 1940s-50s.

Project Information: This project was a joint effort of the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a combined division of the National Park Service. The project was sponsored by the Park Roads Program of the National Park Service. The project supervisor was Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian. Landscape architect Deborah Warshaw (University of Virginia) and historian Timothy Davis (University of Texas) conducted preliminary research during summer 1991. The summer 1992 recording team consisted of:

Robert Harvey, Iowa State University, field supervisor
Timothy Davis, University of Texas, historian
Amy Ross, University of Virginia, historian
Deborah Warshaw, University of Virginia, landscape architect
Dorota Pape-Siliwonczuk, US/ICOMOS-Poland, Board of Historical Palaces and Gardens Restoration, landscape architect
Tony Arcaro, Catholic University, architect
Evan Miller, University of Colorado-Boulder, architect
Steven Nose, University of Maryland, architect
Jack E. Boucher, HABS/HAER photographer

Related Structures documented by HABS/HAER:

HABS No. DC-664 Embassy Gulf Service Center, 2200 P St., N.W. (Embassy Chevron)
HABS No. DC-665 Watergate Exxon, 2708 Virginia Ave., S.W.
HAER No. DC-6 (addendum) Connecticut Avenue Bridge (William H. Taft Bridge)
HAER No. DC-20 K Street Bridge
HAER No. DC-21 Pennsylvania Avenue Bridge
HAER No. DC-22 Massachusetts Avenue Bridge (Charles C. Glover Bridge)
HAER No. DC-23 Calvert Street Bridge (Duke Ellington Bridge)
HAER No. DC-24 Woodley Lane Bridge Abutment
HAER No. DC-35 Lyons Mill Footbridge (Devil's Chair Footbridge)
HAER No. DC-36 Saddle Club Footbridge (Shoreham Hill Footbridge)
HAER No. DC-37 M Street Bridge
HAER No. DC-38 Q Street Bridge (Dumbarton Bridge)
HAER No. DC-48 P Street Bridge

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Project Information 5

Introduction 6
- Description 6
- Detailed Description 9

Significance 16

Contexts 19
- Nature 19
- The City Beautiful 25
- The Evolution of the Landscape Design Profession 27
- Parkways 28

History and Development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway 43
- Washington at the Turn of the 20th Century 43
- To Fill or Not to Fill? 48
- The Parkway Begins to Take Shape 61
- Legislation 66
- Acquisition 68
- Fine-Tuning the Design 79
- Construction 94
- Reception: from "Park" to "Way" 101

Alterations and Proposed Improvements, 1936-1992 105
- Early Revisions 109
- The Zoo Tunnel 111
- Parkway or Expressway? 114
- The Proposed U.S. 240 Extension through Rock Creek Park 127
- Additional Changes 133

Related Structures 136
- Harry T. Thompson Boat Center 136
- U.S. Park Police Stable 136
- John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts 137
- Watergate Complex 140

Sources Consulted 142

ROCK CREEK AND POTOMAC PARKWAY:
History and Description

By

Timothy Davis
HABS Historian

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.
1991-92

PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway in Washington, D.C., was undertaken as a two-year pilot project to help establish standards and guidelines for recording the structures and landscape features of park roads and parkways. This project was a joint effort of the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a combined division of the National Park Service, Robert Kapsch, chief. The project was sponsored by the Park Roads Program of the National Park Service, John Gingles, deputy chief, Engineering and Safety Services Division. The project supervisor was Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

Historian Timothy Davis (University of Texas) and landscape architect Deborah Warshaw (University of Virginia) conducted preliminary research on the parkway's history and design during summer 1991. The Washington-based summer 1992 documentation team was headed by landscape architect Robert Harvey (Iowa State University-Department of Landscape Architecture) who served as field supervisor; the landscape architects were Deborah Warshaw (University of Virginia) and Dorota Pape-Siliwonczuk (US/ICOMOS-Poland, Board of Historical Palaces and Gardens Restoration); the architects were Evan Miller (University of Colorado-Boulder), Steven Nose (University of Maryland), and Tony Arcaro (Catholic University). The historians were Timothy Davis (University of Texas) and Amy Ross (University of Virginia). Jack E. Boucher made the large-format photographs; Air Survey Corporation of Sterling, Virginia, produced the aerial photography and digital mapping from which the site-plan delineations were made.

The summer 1992 team produced fifty drawings. These include measured drawings of the parkway's topography and vegetation, illustrative cross-sections, bridge elevations, and reproductions of historic plans. The bridge elevations and historic plans were based on existing drawings in various government archives. The primary delineation of the parkway landscape was based on aerial photogrammetry: a 200' wide corridor was photographed from an average altitude of 1,800'. These images were digitized to depict 1' contours, tree canopy with trunk placement for specimen trees, bridges with spot heights and saddles, and outlines of the road and creek. The architects and landscape architects checked the computer-generated drawings in the field and gathered additional information on tree and ground cover, plant species, and areas of the parkway that lay outside the 200' corridor. This data was synthesized to produce detailed drawings at a scale of 1"=40', with 2' contours. These drawings were produced on extra-large 34" x 44" E-size mylar. The digitized topographical information was stored on magnetic tape that will be filed at the National Park Service-National Capital Region. HABS/HAER photographer Jack Boucher made large format photographs of the parkway and associated bridges. These include a comprehensive series of aerial views and a selection of significant vistas taken from ground level.

The research for the narrative history component of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway recording project was based on a variety of sources, including government reports and agency archives, newspaper articles, photographs, original plans and drawings, and maps. Most of this material was found in the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and in the Cartographic and Architectural Records Research Room at the Pickett Street Annex in Alexandria, Virginia. The Washingtoniana Collection of the Martin Luther King Memorial Library also contains many photographs and newspaper clippings relating to Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. A detailed list of sources appears at the end of this report. Additional information on the associated bridges and gas stations can be found in the individual reports listed on page 2.

INTRODUCTION

Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway is the oldest of several scenic parkways in and around the nation's capital. Proposed as early as 1867, the parkway was authorized by Congress in 1913 and completed in 1936. Because of its unique location in time and place, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway provides an ideal prism through which to view a number of important developments in the history of Washington and in the evolution of broader design and cultural issues that have characterized the development of urban America over the last century.

The parkway's two-and-a-half miles encapsulate a century of American urban design theory and practice. Its conception and design were firmly embedded in turn-of-the-century urban improvement philosophies and romantic landscape aesthetics, yet it was completed at a time when new dimensions of speed, scale, and social and spatial organization were entering the urban equation. Conceived by landscape architects as a scenic pleasure route linking the District's two major parks, by the time of its completion highway officials were promoting the parkway as a major commuter thoroughfare uniting downtown Washington with the northwest suburbs. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s highway engineers produced extravagant transportation plans for the greater Washington area that would have drastically altered the road's park-like qualities for the sake of increased traffic volume. Citizens' protests and changing planning priorities thwarted most of these proposals in the 1960s. Preserving the scenic quality and historical integrity of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway in the face of ever-increasing traffic demands remains a complex challenge for park managers and city planners.

Description

Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway follows the Potomac riverfront from the Lincoln Memorial in West Potomac Park to the mouth of Rock Creek, where it swings abruptly inland and curves along the bottom of Rock Creek valley. The parkway then winds along the tree-lined stream and under a series of impressive early twentieth-century masonry-covered bridges before reaching its official terminus at the tunnel at the southern edge of the National Zoological Park. The parkway is two-and-a-half miles long. The width of the bordering parkland ranges from a narrow grassy strip along the Potomac opposite the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts to a more generous corridor averaging slightly more than 500' through most of the densely wooded valley. In the amphitheater-like sections below the Connecticut Avenue and P Street bridges, the parkway broadens significantly to provide an expanse of open lawns bordered by trees and shrubs. Rock Creek valley begins at K Street and rapidly reaches a depth of approximately 50'. This depth is maintained up to the P Street bend, where the valley walls gradually steepen, rising 80' above the stream near Massachusetts Avenue and climbing to 120' in the vicinity of the Connecticut Avenue Bridge.

The waterfront section of the parkway is a gracefully curving avenue flanked by rows of regularly spaced sycamores. It provides expansive views over the Potomac River, but the natural scenery is sometimes overshadowed by the bulky, modernist forms of the Kennedy Center, the Watergate complex, and the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge. Between the waterfront and P Street, the parkway landscape is a uniformly sloped man-made valley, having been reclaimed from

city dumps and industrial use through extensive excavation and regrading. Most of the original plantings have been lost, and thick stands of volunteer floodplain species prevail except in areas kept clear by regular mowing. The long, open bank on the west side of the roadway between M and P streets is resplendent with daffodils in early spring. Above Massachusetts Avenue, the original valley landscape is largely preserved and dense forests of mature hardwoods predominate.

Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway is part of a larger integrated system of parks and scenic parkways surrounding the national capital. Its original function was to provide an attractive route between Rock Creek Park and West Potomac Park that would enable carriages and equestrians to avoid the dangers and distractions of ordinary city streets. Midway through the valley, two other small, federally owned parks, Montrose Park and Dumbarton Oaks Park, extend from the parkway up the steep, wooded slopes toward Georgetown. The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historic Park begins just west of the canal's junction with Rock Creek, and extends westward through Georgetown and along the Potomac Palisades. Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway itself comprises about 175 acres. The greater Washington parkway system totals about 70 miles and includes the Mount Vernon Memorial Parkway connecting Washington and Mount Vernon via the Arlington Memorial Bridge, the George Washington Memorial Parkway and Clara Barton Parkway, extending north on both sides of the Potomac River, the Suitland Parkway leading to Andrews Air Force Base, and the Baltimore-Washington Parkway.[1]

Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway is under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service and is designated Reservation No. 360. Reservation No. 360 officially ends about 200' north of the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge, but the parkway's designers and District planners have generally considered the traffic circle between the Lincoln Monument and Arlington Memorial Bridge to be the parkway's actual southern terminus. National Capital Parks-Central administers the southern end of the parkway along the Potomac waterfront, and the Rock Creek Park unit administers the parkway from Virginia Avenue north to the National Zoo. Four different federal entities are responsible for the parkway's maintenance.[2] The bridges that carry city streets across the parkway are owned and maintained by the District of Columbia Department of Public Works.

Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway's valley location and thick bordering vegetation allow motorists to drive almost to the heart of the city through an attractive, naturalistic environment that effectively conceals the surrounding cityscape. Southbound drivers experience a gradual transition from the sinuous curves of the secluded, densely wooded upper valley to the broader views and hectic urbanized landscape of the developed waterfront. Northbound motorists rapidly leave the city behind as they pass through the gantlet of concrete overpasses surrounding the Whitehurst Expressway and enter the tree-lined lower reaches of Rock Creek valley north of the Pennsylvania Avenue Bridge.

---

[1] Jere L. Krakow, Historic Resource Study: Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, George Washington Memorial Parkway, Suitland Parkway, Baltimore-Washington Parkway (U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service, 1990), 25; Sara Amy Leach, "Fifty Years of Parkway Construction In and Around the Nation's Capital," Roadside America: The Automobile in Design and Culture, edited by Jan Jennings (Ames, Iowa: Iowa University Press, 1990), 189.

[2] Rock Creek Park maintains the parkway north of Virginia Avenue. The Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historic Park maintains the area from Virginia Avenue to the Potomac River. The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is responsible for the section along the Potomac waterfront. National Capital Parks-Central maintains the stretch from the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge to the traffic circle between the Lincoln Memorial and the Arlington Memorial Bridge.

The parkway's main drive consists primarily of an asphalt wearing surface laid over a crushed-stone base course, with precast mountable curbs in most sections and granite curbs in the newly renovated stretch along the Potomac waterfront. Several sections, such as the area between the retaining walls north of Q Street, have been reinforced with a concrete base.[3] Road width on the main parkway drive is generally 44', with some widening at major curves. Through most of its length, the parkway carries two lanes of traffic in either direction, with no median strip dividing the opposing streams. In the middle section, however, from just above the Dumbarton Bridge to the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge, the north- and southbound lanes separate into two 24'-wide roadways whose individual paths around an island of grass and trees help preserve the valley's contours and enhance the scenic driving experience. A 4'-wide belgian block median extends from just north of the K Street Bridge to the intersection with West Potomac Park's road system south of the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge.

By modern highway construction standards, the road through Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway would be considered unacceptably narrow and sharply curving. It has several other features that contemporary traffic experts consider inefficient and potentially hazardous. Large trees and bridge abutments stand much closer to the line of travel than modern safety guidelines permit. The absence of medians between oncoming streams of traffic is now generally prohibited in the design of such heavily traveled roadways. While cross-traffic is separated by overpasses north of Virginia Avenue, access roads enter the parkway abruptly, without the merging lanes employed in later highway design. This is particularly problematic where southbound traffic from Massachusetts Avenue enters the parkway via the Waterside Drive overpass. Most of the entrance roads have steep grades, very tight curves, and poor visibility for traffic traveling at modern speeds. The parkway's curves have minimal superelevation, or "banking," which helps motorists maintain control when turning at high speeds. The posted speed limit is only 35 mph, but this is routinely ignored by most motorists. Enforcement is nearly impossible, however. Park police admit that it is difficult to stop and ticket offenders, because the parkway has no break-down lanes, and there are few safe places to pull off the to the side of the roadway. These factors, together with the monumental crossing bridges and careful attention to landscape design, date Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway as an early example of urban highway construction. There have been numerous attempts to upgrade the roadway to contemporary standards. Yet the scenic qualities and sense of seclusion from the surrounding city afforded by Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway's carefully landscaped course have successfully mediated against repeated attempts to convert the original design into a high-volume, high-speed modern expressway.

---

[3] There is conflicting information on the extent of the concrete road base. In 1934, National Capital Parks superintendent C. Marshall Finan recommended the use of a 10" macadam base laid in two courses: a 6-1/2" base bound with cinders or screenings and a 3-1/2" top course bound with screenings and asphalt penetration. This was to topped with a two-layer bituminous concrete wearing surface. Curbs and gutters were to be precast to current park service specifications. (C. Marshall Finan, superintendent NCP-NPS to J.C. Gotwals, Engineer Commissioner, D.C., July 26, 1934, National Park Service-National Capital Parks Roads File, RG 79, National Archives).

A 1939 survey of park roads in the National Capital Region described Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway as containing 4.98 miles of "modern, well-constructed roads" consisting of a "bituminous concrete wearing course over a cement concrete base." (Alfred D. Curradi, associate engineer, "Report On General Survey Of National Capital Parks Roads," Branch of Engineering, National Park Service, 27 July 1939, p. 4, National Park Service-National Capital Parks Roads File, RG 79, National Archives).

Original construction photographs show both types of road bases, with concrete base being poured above Q Street and under the Waterside Drive Overpass, and crushed stone base in other sections. David Newman, head of maintenance for Rock Creek Park in 1992, asserted that all of the sections of parkway that he had worked on in several decades of service have had a crushed stone base. (Interview with David Newman, Rock Creek Park Headquarters, 12 August 1992).

Detailed Description

Southbound motorists can enter the north end of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway either directly from Rock Creek Park via the zoo tunnel, or by descending the west side of the valley where it broadens below the Connecticut Avenue Bridge. Cathedral Avenue descends gradually along the boundary of the National Zoo to the valley floor, while an access road from Calvert Street cuts down a moderate slope known as Shoreham Hill. Prior to the completion of the zoo tunnel in 1966, traffic was forced to take these routes at night when the zoo was closed or when high water blocked the ford that provided the only direct connection between Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and Rock Creek Park. The confluence of these three routes south of the Connecticut Avenue Bridge produces major traffic jams at peak use periods. Traffic engineers have long proposed a series of grade separation structures to replace the existing stop signs and traffic islands, but park managers believe that the contemplated overpasses and related construction would be an unacceptable infringement on the scenic qualities of the parkway.

Motorists coming from the zoo tunnel pass underneath the soaring arches of the Calvert Street and Connecticut Avenue Bridge before arriving in the open area where the other roads join the parkway. These monumental structures were designed by Paul Cret and George Morison, respectively. The Connecticut Avenue, or William Howard Taft Bridge (HAER No. DC-6) was completed in 1907 and named after the ex-president, who lived nearby, in 1931. When completed, it was the largest concrete bridge in the world and was known as the "Million Dollar Bridge," in reference to its enormous cost and extravagant decoration. It is also significant for its method of construction, which consists of unreinforced concrete poured inside a shell of precast concrete panels.[4] The Calvert Street Bridge (HAER No. DC-23) was completed in December 1935 and renamed the Duke Ellington Bridge following the famous bandleader's death in 1974. It is 750' long and supported by three 146' wide arches that tower 130' over Rock Creek. Four sculptural reliefs by Leon Hermant decorate the abutments, symbolizing transportation by rail, sea, highway, and air. These bridges contribute to the picturesque character of the parkway experience, as do the other arched bridges farther south along the parkway. Partially concealed by the surrounding vegetation, they evoke the aqueducts and ruins found in romantic landscape paintings and gardens.[5]

The open grassy area on the west side of the parkway below the Calvert Street/Cathedral Avenue access roads originally served as an arena for equestrian events. It now functions primarily as a picnic and sunbathing area, and as the start of a fitness course that follows the walkway/bikepath, or "multi-use trail," along the parkway. Bridle paths were an integral component of the original parkway design, but with the decline of horseback riding as a popular park pursuit, the parkway's bridle paths have been abandoned or converted to a combined bike and foot path. With the exception of the mounted park police, horses are no longer permitted on the parkway trails. The former public stables located on the east side of Rock Creek just north of the Connecticut Avenue Bridge are now used solely by the U.S. Park Police.

---

[4] Zack Spratt, "Rock Creek Bridges," Records of the Columbia Historical Society 53-56 (1959): 122.

[5] Fact Sheet, Calvert Street Bridge Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives; Donald B. Myer, Bridges and the City of Washington (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, 1973), 68-71.

At the southern edge of this clearing, the parkway crosses to the east side of Rock Creek on the Shoreham Hill Bridge. This is a low stone-faced concrete structure built in 1938 to replace a temporary two-lane bridge fashioned in 1927 with steel trusses salvaged from Georgetown's old Aqueduct Bridge.[6] From this point to Massachusetts Avenue, the parkway winds through a deep, steeply walled valley characterized by dense stands of mature mixed hardwoods and dense underbrush. While most of the vegetation south of Q Street dates from well after the parkway's construction, the north end of the parkway was heavily forested prior to the parkway's creation and many old trees remain. The paved multi-use trail follows a strip of lawn lying between the roadway and the creek. A semi-official footpath departs from the Saddle Club Footbridge (HAER No. DC-36) and extends through the woods on the west side of Rock Creek, passing under the west side of the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge, and connecting with the footpaths in Dumbarton Oaks Park and Montrose Park.[7] Just north of the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge the northbound and southbound traffic lanes separate, with the northbound lane taking a slightly higher route along the east side of the valley. The Massachusetts Avenue Bridge (HAER No. DC-22) was designed by Washington architect Louis Justement and completed in 1941. The single broad arch, with its rubble stone facing and granite trim replaced an earthen causeway built in 1901 to carry Massachusetts Avenue across Rock Creek valley at this point.[8]

The two roadways remain close together for several hundred yards, separated by a narrow asphalt-covered median strip and wood guardrail. The lanes gradually separate to follow independent paths through the rolling terrain of the broadening valley floor. This is one of the most attractive areas of the parkway. The narrow, separated roadways create a relaxing, sylvan character that is enhanced by the leafy canopy where the trees meet overhead. Mowing keeps the ground partly open around artfully placed specimen trees. This stretch of the parkway presents a more manicured, park-like effect than the densely forested valley farther north. A break in the trees at this point provides a glimpse of Oak Hill Cemetery, where elaborate monuments extend almost to the west bank of Rock Creek. Motorists are treated to more extensive views of this handsome cemetery after the trees shed their leaves in the fall.

A narrow access road known as Waterside Drive descends from Massachusetts Avenue along the east side of the valley. Waterside Drive crosses the northbound parkway drive on a rustic stone-faced overpass constructed in 1932. This structure includes a small tower originally designed for police supervision of the parkway. It also housed public restrooms and a storeroom for the park

---

[6] "Filling Last Link in Long Parkway," Washington Evening Star, 27 February 1927; "Temporary Park Span Soon To Be Open," Washington Evening Star, 5 May 1927; "New Rock Creek Bridge is Begun: Traffic North of Massachusetts Avenue to Continue During Construction," Washington Evening Star, 26 January 1938. The Shoreham Bridge is 44' wide and cost $93,000. It has a single span with an elliptical arch and is faced with random laid native gneiss stone; Spratt, "Rock Creek's Bridges," 123.

[7] The Saddle Club Footbridge was built in 1934 for $3,830 and paid for by the Public Works Administration. It is a concrete arch structure with deteriorating wooden railings. The name stems from its original function as a bridle path bridge and from its proximity to the Wardman Saddle Club, which was located just west of the parkway on the site of the present Shoreham Hotel (Spratt, "Rock Creek's Bridges," 123).

[8] "Massachusetts Avenue Bridge Ending 'Bottleneck' Planned," Washington Evening Star, 19 March 1939; "Dynamiting Old Rock Creek Tunnel," Washington Evening Star, 11 September 1941. The Massachusetts Avenue Bridge is 104' high, 350' long, and 75' high; it was built by Potts and Callahan Company of Baltimore, Maryland at a cost of $478,487 (Spratt, "Rock Creek's Bridges," 124).

maintenance force.[9] Safety concerns prompted park management to discontinue these uses in the 1970s. Trees and shrubs screen the structure from the eyes of southbound motorists. Traffic from the Waterside Drive Overpass enters the left lane of the southbound parkway drive just above the point where the median separating the northbound and southbound lanes terminates. Park managers have long considered this an unsafe arrangement due to the lack of a proper merging zone and poor visibility caused by a curve in the parkway at this point. The multi-use trail diverges from the motorway here, crossing to the west side of Rock Creek just south of Oak Hill Cemetery on the Lyons Mill Footbridge (HAER No. DC-35).[10] An interpretive sign on the east side of the creek provides a brief history of the nineteenth-century mill that occupied this spot until the parkway was created. A poorly maintained footpath following the abandoned roadbed of old Lyons Mill Road provides access to Georgetown at this point. The unmarked path ascends between Oak Hill Cemetery and the overgrown remnants of Mount Zion Cemetery, emerging in a small park located behind the apartment buildings on the north side of Q Street just west of the Dumbarton Bridge. Mount Zion Cemetery is not officially part of the parkway, but Rock Creek Park personnel provide limited maintenance because of the cemetery's significance in the history of Washington's African American community. It is one of the oldest predominantly black cemeteries in the District of Columbia.[11]

Rock Creek valley narrows as it approaches Q Street and the Dumbarton Bridge. The road rises above the creek on an earth fill supported by a stone-faced retaining wall. Another retaining wall holds back the steep slope above the parkway drive. These retaining walls were rebuilt and expanded after a substantial landslide blocked this section of the parkway in 1935.[12] The Dumbarton Bridge (HAER No. DC-38), which carries Q Street across the valley, predates the construction of the parkway. It was designed by architect Glenn Brown and constructed 1914-15 at a cost of $275,000. Sculptor A. Phimster Proctor created the monumental bronze American bisons that guard the bridge approaches on either side of the valley. The Dumbarton Bridge is a heavy-looking structure composed of five rounded arches, capped with protruding parapets that carry the pedestrian walkways. The rows of smaller arches supporting the walkways rise from brackets that terminate in the sculpted heads of American Indian chiefs. These war-bonneted countenances stare down at parkway users below. They were also designed by A. Phimster Proctor, and are reputedly derived from a life mask of an historic chief named Kicking Bear.[13] Rock Creek and the parkway road pass under Dumbarton Bridge through separate archways. The multi-use trail has an arch to itself on the west side of the creek.

---

[9] Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1932 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), 19.

[10] The Lyons Mill Bridge was built at a cost of $2,350 in 1932 to carry the bridle path across Rock Creek. It uses the old stone abutments of a bridge that carried wagon traffic to Lyons Mill in the nineteenth century. The bridge is constructed of reinforced concrete, but is made to resemble a wooden cantilever bridge. Even the concrete railings and posts are meant to look like wooden timbers (Spratt, "Rock Creek's Bridges," 125).

[11] Kathleen M. Lesko, Valerie Babb, and Carroll B. Gibbs, Black Georgetown Remembered: A History of Its Black Community from the Founding of 'The Town of George' in 1751 to the Present Day (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991).

[12] "Bank Cave-in Hurts Gardens, Blocks Street," Washington Post, 13 April 1935; "Park Landslide Funds Requested/$120,000 Sought to Clear Drive--Landscaping Progresses," Washington Evening Star, September 1935.

[13] Myer, Bridges and the City of Washington, 63; Spratt, "Rock Creek's Bridges," 126.

The parkway crosses back to the west bank of the creek between Q and P streets. The present bridge is in the approximate site of a colonial-era ford used by French re-enforcements en route to Yorktown in 1781. This event is memorialized in a bronze tablet presented by the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1934 and mounted in the east guardrail of the bridge.[14] Completion of this bridge in June 1936 finally enabled motorists to drive the entire length of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway without the inconvenience of having to ascend to the city streets.[15] Immediately after crossing Rock Creek, the parkway passes underneath the P Street Bridge (HAER No. DC-48), another arched, stone-faced concrete structure, built in 1935 to replace an outdated steel truss bridge.

Rock Creek has been radically rechanneled just south of P Street to eliminate a wide easterly bend that once brought the creek closer to 23rd Street. The open grassy area between the new and old creek beds is now a popular sunbathing spot commonly known as "P Street Beach." Early parkway designers had high hopes for developing the scenic potential of this pronounced bulge in the parkway boundaries. Through the 1940s, plans called for the creation of expansive vistas at this point to contrast with the narrow, tree-lined upper valley.[16] Currently, however, volunteer tree growth along Rock Creek obstructs the proposed sightlines so that passing motorists can hardly tell that the parkway broadens significantly at this point. Thick growth along the street-level boundary of P Street Beach contributes to the visual isolation this area, which has developed a reputation as a haven for various illicit activities.

The character of the parkway begins to change south of the P Street bend. The valley widens, the flanking trees become smaller and are set back farther from the roadway. Occasional glimpses of the surrounding cityscape signal the transition from the secluded upper valley to the urbanized lower parkway and waterfront. The roadway bends to the right below P Street then curves slowly back to the left before entering a relatively straight stretch that continues to just south of the Pennsylvania Avenue Bridge, where it crosses back to the east side of Rock Creek. While this stretch is hordered with medium-sized trees and lush undergrowth, the area possesses little of the picturesque charm of the upper valley. The intimate woodland landscape with its winding roadway, large trees, and rapidly changing views gives way to a homogeneous greenery-lined corridor typical of many later urban expressways. The masonry-covered steel span of the M Street Bridge (HAER No. DC-37), constructed over the Commission of Fine Arts' protests in 1929, breaks the pattern of gracefully curving arches established by the previous bridges.[17] The Pennsylvania Avenue span (HAER No. DC-21), rebuilt in 1915 around an innovative cast iron aqueduct structure designed in 1858 by noted American engineer General Montgomery Meigs, marks a temporary return to the arched-bridge

---

[14] Spratt, "Rock Creek's Bridges," 126-127.

[15] "New Park Bridge Will Open/Span North of P street to Admit Traffic Tomorrow Morning," Washington Evening Star, 3 June 1936; "Park Roads Link Opens Tomorrow," Washington Post, 3 June 1936.

[16] Views back and forth between the parkway and this clearing are delineated on a map labeled "Proposed Development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, Sections I and II," National Capital Parks, June 1940.

[17] "Arts Group Frowns on M Street Bridge/Present Design Would Create 'Perpetual Eyesore' Over Rock Creek Says Report," Washington Evening Star, 12 March 1928; "May Build Bridge Despite Protest/Commissioners Indicate Fine Arts Disapproval will not Balk Project," Washington Evening Star, 2 March 1928; "Washington's Bridges," editorial, Washington Evening Star, 12 April 1929.

pattern.[18] The broad low archway of this bridge predates the roadway and visually constricts the parkway, leaving scant room for the multi-use trail on the west side of the road.

Below Pennsylvania Avenue the parkway becomes more urban in character. A large brick steam-distribution plant built in the 1940s towers over the west side of the parkway beside the old Chesapeake and Ohio Canal entrance. The unadorned concrete overpasses of the Whitehurst Freeway crisscross above the parkway on either side of the older, ivy-covered arches of the 1941 K Street Bridge (HAER No. DC-20). Two of these massive concrete ramps lead nowhere, silent monuments to the frustrated dreams of urban highway planners. A rapid succession of exit and entrance roads in this area puts an end to the parkway's free-flowing isolation from the city's surface traffic system. This transition is completed at Virginia Avenue, where motorists encounter their first traffic light since entering the parkway. A distant view of the Washington Monument along the axis of Virginia Avenue helps orient the parkway in relation to the formal avenues and gridded streets of downtown Washington. Rock Creek, having departed from the parkway amid the swirl of freeway ramps and parking lots, anticlimactically enters the Potomac just below Virginia Avenue. The junction of Rock Creek and the Potomac River--a potentially dramatic design feature--is obscured by a clump of bushes and small trees that conceal a nondescript public boathouse constructed in the late 1950s.

After passing by the rustic stone gas station (HABS No. DC-665) designed in 1932 at the corner of Virginia Avenue, the parkway curves past the Watergate residential and commercial complex and along the Potomac River. The waterfront section of the parkway runs between rows of widely spaced sycamores and strips of grass that narrow as the imposing bulk of the Kennedy Center looms overhead. This tree-lined drive was intended to serve as a graceful transition between the picturesque natural landscape of Rock Creek valley and the monumental neoclassical designs at the southern terminus of the Mall. Until the construction of the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge, the Kennedy Center, and Watergate in the 1960s, the junction of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and West Potomac Park was a largely undeveloped area characterized by broad views of open parkland, tree-lined drives, and the unbroken sweep of the Potomac River. This effect is retained somewhat on the southbound drive, though the stark steel span of the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge truncates the Potomac vista, and Watergate and the Kennedy Center inject a scale and modernist severity that would probably have disappointed the parkway's designers.

South of the Kennedy Center, the parkway passes under stone-clad approaches to the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge and ascends along a balustraded seawall to its ceremonial terminus at the traffic circle between the Lincoln Memorial and Arlington Memorial Bridge. James E. Fraser's statues symbolizing the arts of peace flank the entrance to Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. These sculptures mark the parkway's incorporation into the grand design of the Mall, and balance Leo Friedlander's monumental sculptures of war adorning the abutments of Arlington Memorial Bridge. Much to the dismay of the parkway's designers, traffic circulation concerns forced the District highway engineers to route motorists underneath the abutment of the Arlington Memorial Bridge and across the ceremonial Watergate steps. From the rotary behind the Lincoln Memorial, northbound traffic from the Arlington Memorial Bridge curves south before reversing directions, joining the extension of Ohio Drive and Independence Avenue and passing under the bridge abutment. It then bisects the Watergate terraces, goes through the seawall, and winds around a small park before

---

[18] Myer, Bridges and the City of Washington, 58-59.

reuniting with the main parkway drive across from a small turnout below the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge. Southbound parkway traffic heading for Independence Avenue and East Potomac Park traces this route in the opposite direction.

The modernist legacy of the 1960s intrudes more forcefully on northbound parkway users. The jutting prow of the Kennedy Center completely overshadows the northbound parkway lanes, surrounding motorists with concrete and asphalt on three sides and creating a gloomy, tunnel-like effect. While the irregular terraces of Watergate curve away from southbound drivers and help minimize the buildings's visual impact, northbound drivers approach against the grain of the complex; the jagged concrete balconies of the multiple towers dominate the motorist's forward view. Nature affords some respite on the left side of the parkway, as tree-covered Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Island partially screens the soaring glass towers of Rosslyn, Virginia. In similar fashion, the creek mouth plantings below Virginia Avenue help block out the garish Post Modern developments along the Georgetown waterfront.

The transition from urban waterfront to wooded valley is more dramatic for the northbound motorist. Passing through the maze of overpasses and entrance ramps north of Virginia Avenue, the parkway appears little different from other overcrowded mid twentieth-century commuter arteries. Even the historic Godey Lime Kilns just east of the parkway are lost in the jumble of expressway ramps and merging traffic. An electrical relay station and sewage pumping station add to the confusion of utilitarian structures and oddly shaped spaces leftover from expressway construction. A group of trailers located on District of Columbia property just east of the parkway at this point provided temporary shelter for the homeless during 1992. The trailers were removed in spring 1993 because of protests by area residents and businessmen, but many homeless people remained in the area. Their belongings are often seen alongside the parkway under the cover of the freeway ramps, providing a stark reminder of the parkway's urban context.

Just south of the Pennsylvania Avenue Bridge, however, Rock Creek suddenly appears on the right side of the parkway, suggesting that the motorist is about to experience something beyond the ordinary commuting experience. The long, slowly curving valley above M Street rapidly removes the motorist from the hustle and bustle of the inner city. The valley is relatively broad and open in this stretch, but the enclosing vegetation largely conceals the adjacent buildings. At the P Street bend a few apartment buildings peek over the greenery, and the spire of the Church of the Pilgrims rises above the east abutment of the P Street Bridge. These are the only outside structures visible from the parkway until it emerges from the forest below the Connecticut Avenue Bridge.

Above P Street the valley deepens and the trees grow larger, giving the impression that the road is winding through a secluded and sizeable park. The separated roadways between Q Street and Massachusetts Avenue and occasional vistas through sculpted clearings and across the creek enhance this perception. The higher elevation of northbound lanes enables motorists to look out and over the surrounding landscape, providing an even more varied and attractive succession of views than on the southbound drive. As the valley deepens north of Massachusetts Avenue and the trees press against the roadside, the motorist feels distant in both time and space from the fast-paced city overhead. The feeling of exaggerated distance from the surrounding city, and the sense of being in a remote and extensive forest, increases markedly if the motorist continues north through the zoo tunnel and follows the narrower and more circuitous two-lane drive through Rock Creek Park. In both the park and parkway, however, rush hour shatters this sense of solitude and closeness with nature. During

the morning and evening rush hours the parkway becomes a crowded commuter artery where jostling automobiles rather than soothing greenery provide the dominate impression. Within a year of the parkway's opening, rush hour traffic became so heavy that parkway officials established a special policy for peak commuting hours. Since 1937, all four lanes of the parkway have been converted into a southbound thoroughfare during the morning rush hour and reserved for northbound traffic in the late afternoon.[19]

Most people experience Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway primarily in terms of the view from the road, and consider it mainly to be a convenient respite from the city's congested surface traffic system. The parkway has many other users, however; it contains a number of quiet corners and provides opportunities for a variety of activities that are not immediately apparent to motorists whizzing along the valley floor.

Bridle paths were an integral part of the parkway's original design. The parkway opened for horseback riders several years before it was ready for automobile traffic. Local newspapers touted its value to equestrians, and it was heavily used by this constituency through the 1950s. Changing recreational patterns and the closing of nearby stables and riding clubs have all but eliminated equestrian use, but joggers, strollers, bicyclists, race-walkers, and fitness course users keep the path along the bottom of the valley full of activity. Bicycle commuters have created their own rush hours and dominate the paved pathway with shouts of "Behind you!" and "On your left!" as they rush by. Smaller footpaths--some maintained by the National Park Service, some created by informal use--wind in and out of the valley and along the parkway's border with the surface streets.

The parkway boundaries encompass several small parks that serve the adjacent neighborhoods. Rose Park, on the Georgetown side of the parkway between Olive and P streets, contains a playground, basketball and tennis courts, and a baseball diamond, along with a fieldhouse, park benches, and an expanse of grassy lawn. The District of Columbia has operated a summer recreation program here since the 1940s. The recreational facilities at Rose Park were transferred from the National Park Service to the District of Columbia in 1972. On the opposite side of the valley, a municipal swimming pool and other recreational facilities are located along the parkway boundary near Francis Junior High School. The school, pool, and other buildings belong to the city, but the parkway boundary cuts directly across the middle of the ball field. A tiny neighborhood park with benches and shady trees at the corner of 23rd and Q streets is also within the parkway's jurisdiction. Mount Zion Cemetery and the adjacent park-like area northwest of the Dumbarton Bridge is not officially part of the park, but Rock Creek Park personnel provide limited maintenance because the cemetery is part of the Washington Black History Trail. At the mouth of Rock Creek, the Harry T. Thompson Boat Center is located on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway land, but the superintendent of the Chesapeake and Ohio National Historic Park oversees its operations.[20]

The section of Rock Creek Valley between Georgetown and Washington has long been a haven for marginal populations. Prior to the parkway's creation, squatters and tramps occupied

---

[19] "One-Way Traffic Hours Announced in Rock Creek Area," Washington Evening Star, 12 May 1937.

[20] Interview with Michael Brown, assistant superintendent, Rock Creek Park and David Newman, head of maintenance, Rock Creek Park, Rock Creek Park headquarters, 12 August 1992; Barry Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park: Administrative History (Washington, D.C.: History Division, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, 1985), 117.

flimsy hovels and abandoned buildings along the lower valley. Blacks and poor whites lived in brick tenements and dilapidated frame houses above the creek between M and P streets until these structures were displaced by parkway construction in the 1930s. A large African American population had occupied this area since before the Civil War, and continued to live in the remaining small townhouses along the parkway borders until driven out by the gentrification of Georgetown that began in the 1930s and accelerated after World War II. In addition to the sizeable homeless population living underneath the northeast interchange of the Whitehurst Freeway, smaller groups of homeless people inhabit temporary campsites hidden amid the undergrowth in secluded areas of the parkway. Another marginal population, the gay community centered around Dupont Circle, has transformed "P Street Beach" into its own sunbathing and recreational area. Intravenous drug users also frequent the brushy slopes around P Street Beach and the Connecticut Avenue Bridge. The Connecticut Avenue and Calvert Street bridges have long been popular launching platforms for suicidal Washingtonians. High railings were erected on the Calvert Street structure in the late 1980s. On the poorly maintained Connecticut Avenue Bridge, a lone telephone hotline to the Good Samaritans attempts to dissuade potential suicides, though ragged patches on the police stable roof suggest that the effort has been only partially successful.

SIGNIFICANCE

Tracing the conception and development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and documenting its current form is a significant contribution to both the substance and methodology of landscape history and preservation. Few parkways so thoroughly encompass the evolution of this important landscape feature from the leisurely pedestrian promenades and carriage drives of the late nineteenth-century through the golden years of the motor parkway before World War II and on to the postwar highway engineer's dream of efficient modern expressways. While the Bronx River Parkway justly receives credit as the first American parkway constructed expressly for automobiles, the longer history of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway overlaps the transition from carriage drive to motorway, and thus provides an even more revealing insight into the history of park and road design. Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway is one of the major "missing links" in parkway design. The major histories of American parkway building by Norman Newton, Christopher Tunnard, and Phil Patton summarize nineteenth-century boulevard development, cite Olmsted's Eastern Parkway as the first use of the term, and then leap forward to lavish attention on the Bronx River Parkway and Westchester County developments, which were conceived well after the McMillan Commission set out the essential elements of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Since its completion in 1936, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway has weathered numerous attempts to transform its carefully landscaped course into a high-speed commuter artery. Fortunately, the postwar super-expressway-era only succeeded in striking a glancing blow to its southern extremities. Much of the original mileage of the Bronx River Parkway, by contrast, has been radically altered in largely unsuccessful efforts to keep up with ever-increasing traffic demands. Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway's largely undefiled status is by no means assured, however, as pressure to upgrade its historic features in the interest of improved traffic flow continually lurks in the background.[21]

---

[21] Norman T. Newton, Design on the Land: The Development of Landscape Architecture (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); Phil Patton, Open Road: A Celebration of the American Highway (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986); Christopher Tunnard and Boris Pushkarev, Man-Made America: Chaos or Control? (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963; reprint edition: New York: Harmony Books, 1981).

In most people's minds, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway is simply a charming natural landscape. The attractive tree-lined valley provides a pleasant route to work, a place to bike or run, a relaxing escape from city traffic, or perhaps a fleeting impression of greenery viewed from a cross street bridge. Less obviously, however, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway is an extensively debated, meticulously planned, and painstakingly constructed human creation. Despite its timeless natural appearance, the parkway is an artificial environment. It is a continuously evolving and frequently contested space, whose history and present form embody many of the most significant social, intellectual, and technological aspects of urban development over the past hundred years. Examining the history of this seemingly "natural" environment provides evidence of the ways in which many aspects of the built environment that we take for granted as natural or inevitable actually result from complex interactions among various social, political, and economic forces.

Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway's existence and current form were by no means natural or inevitable. Today's parkway bears little resemblance to the lower Rock Creek valley of 100 years ago or to the design proposals put forth at the beginning of the twentieth century. The current parkway landscape is the product of lengthy and often heated debates covering such subjects as the relationship between the federal government and the District of Columbia; the rights of landowners and private businesses versus broader conceptions of civic improvement; the social and economic merits of natural scenery compared to the revenue generation provided by developable real estate; shifting ideas about the role of physical planning as an agent of social and moral reform; professional rivalries over the goals and methods of urban planning; race- and class-based discrimination in the provision of public amenities; and lingering disagreements over how to provide an equitable balance between efficient and safe transportation and scenic beauty and contact with nature in a rapidly growing metropolis.

The competing visions of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway put forth by various landscape architects, city planners, engineers, politicians, business interests, private individuals, and citizens' groups demonstrate that a road is more than simply a ribbon of pavement. The history of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway is not just a record of aesthetic concerns and physical construction. It is a reflection of the inherent tensions of American society, with evidence of spirited individual initiative, well-intentioned efforts at social reform, deeply felt environmental concerns, artistic excellence, and remarkable interdisciplinary teamwork intermingling with economic self-interest, political grandstanding, professional jealousies, overgrown bureaucracies, technological giantism, and race- and class-based discrimination.

This Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway study provides the opportunity to:

1. Present an historical account of a parkway that is significant both for the important role it plays in Washington's past, present, and future, and for its status as an exemplar of many of the major transitions and debates that have characterized the development of American landscape architecture, urban design, and transportation planning;

2. Unite the various aspects of landscape history: aesthetics, politics, engineering, sociology, ecology, biography, and institutional history--which are too often fragmented in separate studies aimed solely at the various sub-disciplines;

3. To describe in detail the development and implementation of one significant urban plan and place it in the larger context of landscape design and social history;

4. To trace its subsequent fate: too often, histories of architecture and urban form end with the completion of the initial grand designs; this study will demonstrate the shortsightedness of such an approach, showing that landscapes are continuously evolving and contested spaces, whose forms and social functions do not always assume the identities intended by their creators;

5. To develop an integrated approach to conducting the history and visual documentation of a road and its environs that will serve as a model for future HABS/HAER projects.

CONTEXTS

The major social, intellectual, and technological currents affecting the design of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway were the lingering influence of mid nineteenth-century beliefs in the beneficial influence of natural scenery, the rise of comprehensive city planning typified by the rise of the City Beautiful movement at the turn of the century, the proliferation of the automobile and the concomitant development of parkways as a distinctive design type, and the professionalization of social and physical reform that began with the Progressive spirit of the late nineteenth century and evolved to produce the exhaustive and occasionally heavy-handed master planning associated with post World War II urban renewal initiatives. The immediate social, physical, and economic conditions of turn-of-the-century Washington--in particular the degraded conditions of lower Rock Creek valley and the desire of prominent citizens to improve the appearance and commercial vigor of the national capital--strongly influenced the timing and eventual form of the parkway's development. The particular richness of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway as an historical subject lies in the way in which its lengthy development process and subsequent history encapsulate many of the most significant transitions in the evolution of American urban planning and design.

Nature

The changing perceptions of the parkway's basic physical characteristics underscore the fact that "nature" is not a fixed biological entity but a continually evolving and thoroughly mediate social construction. Throughout the parkway's history, its scenic qualities and the benefits to be derived there from nature have been defined in terms that suited the needs and beliefs of its promoters.[22] The parkway's history encompasses the transformation from the Romantic view of nature as a place for moral and spiritual uplift to a more modern and utilitarian perception of undeveloped areas as space for transportation corridors, active physical recreation, and buffers zones between incompatible uses and populations. Along the way, parkway promoters have also invoked the value of nature as a means of achieving less noble goals. These include the enhancement of adjacent property values and the replacement of low-income housing and its inhabitants with unthreatening surroundings of trees and grass. More recently, the parkway's artfully constructed landscape has appealed to ecologically minded planners as an irreplaceable biological resource in need of careful scientific management.

America's first public landscape parks were not parks, per se, but attractively laid out garden cemeteries located in pleasant suburban districts like Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Brooklyn, New York. During the 1830s, when these garden cemeteries first appeared, nature was presented as a source of moral, religious, and intellectual instruction. Nature was God's testament writ large, and America--with more untouched nature than any other Europeanized country--was "Nature's Nation." Cultivating an appreciation of natural scenery and becoming conversant with the picturesque aesthetics

---

[22] Georgetown merchants, who perceived Rock Creek as a barrier to economic development and thus believed their interests would be best served by filling it in to create streets and developable real estate, expressly defined Rock Creek Valley as "not nature." Their petitions and briefs underscored the industrial and degraded status of the lower valley and urged that it be filled and developed into productive land. See "Georgetown Citizens' Association" material and "Minutes of a Hearing Granted Richard J. Beall and Gen. A. C. Hawley in reference to Sen. Bill No. 7169 'Providing for the arching of Rock Creek from L Street to Connecticut Avenue extended,'" 7 March 1905, in Entry 241, Correspondence of the Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Parks of the National Capital, Record Group 42, National Archives.

of Romantic landscape painting were thus both religious and patriotic pursuits and a means of demonstrating one's wealth and cultural refinement.

Mid nineteenth-century landscape designers such as Andrew Jackson Downing preached that moralism and aesthetics were deeply intertwined. To view a beautiful natural scene was to receive a lesson in the transcendental correspondence between beauty, goodness, and truth. Parks, according to Downing, "would soften and humanize the rude, educate and enlighten the ignorant, and give continual enjoyment to the educated."[23] In addition to its edifying natural scenery, the garden cemetery was full of monuments memorializing successful men. These theoretically served as further inspiration toward hard work and civic virtue. While only the well-to-do could afford plots in the more elegant cemeteries like Mount Auburn, Laurel Hill, and Greenwood, the general public could stroll through the cemetery grounds and imbibe the lessons of nature and virtue.

The actual landscape of these cemeteries was not "natural" at all, but highly contrived, with winding lanes and picturesque views that embodied the romantic sensibilities of contemporary artists. Like the painter or poet, the landscape gardener was supposed to demonstrate his artistry by "improving" the basic terrain in accordance with tenets of the Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque developed by various aestheticians and moral philosophers. In Washington, Rock Creek and Oak Hill cemeteries were designed in this fashion, and Downing laid out the grounds of the National Museum in a picturesque manner with twisting walkways, ornamental plantings, and an intimate scale that was supplanted in the early twentieth century by the neoclassical monumentality of the McMillan Commission's reorganization of the Mall.

The popularity of garden cemeteries among the general public encouraged American landscape designers to advocate larger urban parks. Central Park, designed in 1858 by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., and his partner Calvert Vaux, and completed after the Civil War, ushered in a new era in park philosophy and design. Olmsted and Vaux toned down the explicitly religious and didactic rhetoric of their predecessors. While they were still steeped in the visual conventions of Romantic landscape aesthetics, the new generation of park designers cast nature in a more vague, therapeutic role as a palliative to the rapid pace of urbanization and industrialization that was transforming American society. They believed that extensive urban parks with broad vistas and occasional patches of wild and rugged scenery would serve to comfort and restore the over-worked and over-urbanized modern citizen. According to Olmsted, the natural scenery of Central Park and its imitators acted "in a directly remedial way to enable men to better resist the harmful influences of ordinary town life and to recover what they lose from them."[24]

Advocates for the establishment of a public park in the upper reaches of Rock Creek valley promoted their cause in language that combined the flowery rhetoric of Romantic landscape appreciation with Olmsted's vaguely sociological concern for relieving the pressures of an increasingly congested urban population. The language of these proposals epitomized the assumptions of mid nineteenth-century landscape designers. In 1866, the U.S. Senate Committee on Public

---

[23] Quoted in David Schuyler, The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 66.

[24] Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., quoted in John Brinckerhoff Jackson, American Space: The Centennial Years, 1865-1876 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972), 217.

Buildings and Grounds directed Major Nathaniel Michler of the Corps of Engineers to prepare a report on the proposed park. Michler asserted that the desirability of turning the upper reaches of Rock Creek into a protected park was so self-evident that it scarcely warranted discussion. In the introduction to his 1867 report, Michler declared:

> Where so much has been written on so interesting a feature to any large city as that of a park, and where the necessity of public grounds, either for the sake of healthful recreation and exercise for all classes of society, or for the gratification of their tastes, whether for pleasure or curiosity, has become so apparent to every enlightened community, it would seem to be unnecessary for me to dilate further upon the matter.[25]

For the benefit of congressional philistines not yet converted to the value of urban parks, Michler summarized the prevailing "enlightened" belief in the virtues of intimate contact with nature, contending that the proposed park would "cultivate an appreciative and refined taste in those who seek its shade for the purpose of breathing the free air of Heaven and admiring nature."[26] To instruct readers unfamiliar with the conventions of Romantic landscape appreciation, Michler provided a brief verbal sketch of the ideal picturesque landscape park.

> There should be a variety of scenery, a happy combination of the beautiful and the picturesque--the smooth plateau and the gently undulating glade vying with the ruggedness of the rocky ravine and the fertile valley, the thickly mantled primeval forest contrasting with the green lawn, grand old trees with flowering shrubs. Wild, bold, rapid streams, coursing their way along the entire length and breadth of such a scene, would not only lend enchantment to the view but add to the capabilities of adornment.[27]

Michler contended that all of these features could be found in the upper reaches of Rock Creek valley. To the nineteenth-century scenery aesthete, however, even as naturally attractive an environment as the proposed park was still wanting in refinement and beauty. Unimproved nature was merely a starting point for the landscape designer's art. Trees, rocks, brooks, and slopes were not inviolate entities to be preserved for their own sake, but raw material from which to develop pleasing pictorial compositions. Michler found "nature diversified in every hue," but noted that it was "needing but the taste of the artist and the skill of the engineer to enhance its beauty and usefulness." Michler suggested "gentle pruning and removing what may be distasteful, improving the roads and paths and the construction of new ones, and increasing the already large growth of trees and shrubs, deciduous and evergreen, by adding to them those of other climes and countries." His report advocated damming Rock Creek in several places to create ornamental lakes and ponds. After

---

[25] U.S. Congress. Senate. Communication of N. Michler, Major of Engineers, to the Chairman of the Committee of Public Buildings and Grounds, relative to a suitable site for a public park and presidential mansion, Sen. Doc. No. 21 to Accompany S. 549, 39th Cong., 2nd Session, 1867, 1.

[26] Michler, Sen. Doc. No. 21, 1.

[27] Michler, Sen. Doc. No. 21, 2.

praising the size and variety of native trees, he advised, "Beautiful vistas, artistically arranged, can be cut through them, while charming promenades can invite the wanderer to seek cooling shades."[28]

While this sort of aggressive reshaping of nature might seem reprehensible compared to later, more ecologically based management philosophies, Rock Creek Park's promoters were part of a nascent conservation movement. Americans were becoming increasingly concerned with the destruction of the natural landscape, and by the 1860s were beginning to preserve particularly scenic locales from encroaching development. The federal government ceded Yosemite Valley to the state of California for park purposes two years before Michler was commissioned to make his report. Yellowstone became America's first national park in 1872. When the purchase of upper Rock Creek valley was approved by an act of Congress in 1890, it joined Yosemite, Sequoia, and General Grant (now King's Canyon) in the initial expansion of the federally protected park system.[29]

By the end of the nineteenth century, supporters of urban parks were emphasizing concrete civic health improvements as an added benefit of park development. A number of important park projects, including Boston's Metropolitan Park System, the Bronx River Parkway, and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, were cast as public-health improvements designed to clean up and beautify streams that carried sewage and industrial pollution through residential and commercial areas. At the same time, Progressive reformers touted both formal and informal landscape parks as socially desirable alternatives to crowded tenements and to the ramshackle settlements that tended to appear in the marginal lands coveted by park promoters. By replacing such ugly reminders of urban poverty with pleasantly landscaped grounds, reformers could claim to be remedying the moral and physical dangers associated with shanty towns and slum conditions--though they rarely concerned themselves with the subsequent fate of those evicted in the name of urban improvement. In the process of creating Central Park, the Boston park system, the Bronx River Parkway, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, and other urban parks throughout the country, economically and racially marginal populations were evicted so that more substantial citizens could enjoy the health-giving benefits of fresher air, cleaner water, pleasant drives, and attractive semi-natural scenery. Prominent citizens rarely had to worry about losing their homes to the park builders, at least not without substantial compensation. The attractive hillsides to the west of Rock Creek between Massachusetts Avenue and the National Zoo would seem to have been obvious candidates for inclusion in the proposed parkway. This area was controlled by powerful real estate speculators, who were in the process of developing it as an exclusive suburb for well-to-do Washingtonians. While dozens of poor people's homes were eliminated to widen the parkway between M and P streets, the proposed parkway boundaries carefully avoided infringing on this exclusive preserve--despite the fact that the landscape was more inherently suited to park development than the more heavily developed and polluted areas downstream.

In part this was just good economics. As later generations of urban planners and highway engineers would discover, it was both politically and economically easier to push for major redevelopments in areas where property values were low and residents wielded minimal political influence. Park promoters didn't want to appear frivolous. It was hard to convince legislators to

---

[28] Michler, Sen. Doc. No. 21, 3-4.

[29] Mackintosh, 13-14. For a detailed discussion of the rise of the conservation and preservation movements, see Roderick Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

appropriate money for park acquisition, so park promoters tried to keep expenses to a minimum while showing that they weren't removing valuable lands from the tax rolls, or from potential developers' profits. On the contrary, parks and other civic improvements actually added to the tax base and general prosperity, their advocates claimed, by attracting desirable residents and businesses and improving the value of surrounding real estate. In typical fashion, supporters of Rock Creek Park wrote in 1889 that:

> A large part of the grounds needed, though admirable for a public park, is worthless for agricultural or building uses, and most of it is undesirable for residences, in its present condition; but the establishment of the park would add greatly to the value of the lands surrounding it, would make them very desirable for rural residences, and, in fact, would prove a bonus to the owners of such surroundings.[30]

Parkway advocates used similar arguments. Much of the lower Rock Creek valley was too steep to build on and was filled with unstable waste material from private construction, refuse collection, and municipal street improvements and cleaning. Supporters claimed that transforming this blighted area into an attractive parkway would not usurp any valuable real estate, and could only add to the value of surrounding holdings. The creation of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway would also enhance the value of property north of Massachusetts Avenue by serving as a barrier to future undesirable development, while simultaneously eliminating the lower-class population around P Street. When the parkway was created, the residential areas on both sides of Rock Creek between M and P streets contained a predominantly African-American population, and the creek-side bridle path used by "substantial" citizens to reach Rock Creek Park terminated at P Street. The Georgetown side of the parkway became largely white and middle class as the parkway and other developments boosted the value of the remaining old houses above the creek.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, when the battle to create Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was being fought in earnest, most of these ideas about the social, cultural, and physical benefits of urban landscape parks were subscribed to by progressive civic improvement societies and many chamber-of-commerce-type city booster organizations. The amount of land to be devoted to parks, the degree to which the nation's taxpayers should support such a park in the District of Columbia, and its precise location and treatment were still subjects of considerable contention, however, as the subsequent development history will demonstrate. Even after the parkway boundaries were established and the roadway completed, changing conceptions of the preferred form and function of urban nature continued to alter Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway's form and use.

Nineteenth century parks were intended primarily for the passive contemplation of naturalistic scenery rather than for active recreation and organized sports. Aesthetic resistance to the rigid geometries of playing fields and class prejudices against the probable participants in publicly subsidized team sports encouraged Olmsted and other designers of major urban parks to banish these discordant elements from the genteel confines of their edifying compositions.[31] By the 1920s,

---

[30] Rock Creek National Park: Information for the Public in Relation Thereto (Washington: Judd and Detweiler, 1889), 9-11, quoted in Mackintosh, 7-8.

[31] Jackson, American Space, 217.

however, groups such as the National Recreation Association were vigorously promoting the creation of small urban parks designed primarily for active sports and structured play. During the Depression, the Works Project Administration embarked on a heavily financed campaign to build new urban playgrounds and transform sections of existing parks devoted to passive use into places for neighborhood residents to engage in sports and games.[32] The playground equipment, ballfields, and tennis courts of Rose Park, on the west side of the parkway north of Olive Street, together with the similar developments on the other side of the parkway around Francis Junior High School, are products of this period, though they weren't completed until the 1940s. At the same time, the New Deal-sponsored development of state and national parks, together with the widespread automobile ownership that made rural nature accessible, enabled city dwellers to experience large expanses of natural surroundings more easily than ever before. These developments, together with the rapid growth of suburban living, made naturalistic urban parks seem both less natural and less essential than when they had provided the primary alternatives to congested inner city environments.

The outdoor recreation craze that began anew in the 1960s also changed the ways in which people viewed Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway's natural amenities. The outdoors ("nature" having become increasingly associated with biological entities other than humans) was a location for active, and often individual, physical exertion. Urban parks were cast as healthful spaces through which one could run, bike, or hike, rather than as places to contemplate picturesque scenery. In fact, by the middle of the twentieth century, few people even knew what the term "picturesque scenery" meant, or how and why one was supposed to contemplate it.

This renewed health consciousness, together with the desire to develop more environmentally sensitive methods of commuting, established bicyclists as powerful constituents of the parkway landscape. By 1966, Rock Creek Park officials were restricting some roads to bicycle and pedestrian use on Sunday mornings. This initiative gradually evolved into the current practice of closing large sections of Rock Creek Park's road system to automobile traffic on weekends and holidays. In the parkway proper, the rising popularity of cycling resulted in an ill-fated attempt in fall 1971 to reserve one lane of the main roadway for bicycle traffic. This pleased the bicycle lobby, but the resulting automobile traffic tie-ups in and around the parkway infuriated motorists, whose greater political clout rendered this a short-lived experiment. To placate the bicyclists, parkway officials paved the bridle path and constructed additional bikeways in Rock Creek Park.[33] The "par course," a sequence of prescribed exercises stationed along a jogging track, was built along the parkway in the late 1970s. The par course is a highly visible manifestation of the tendency to view the parkway's natural environment as a location to pursue individual physical fitness. One wonders what the original designers of the parkway, who sought to minimize the visual presence of man-made structures in the valley, would think of the odd assortment of pipes, poles, instructional signs, and benches that broadcast the conversion of their scenic promenade into an outdoor gymnasium.

Not all the reconceptualizations of nature over the course of the parkway's history left lasting physical impacts on the its landscape. During the 1950s-60s urban planners took to conceptualizing

---

[32] For more information on "The New Deal and The New Play," see Phoebe Cutler, The Public Landscape of the New Deal (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 8-28.

[33] Mackintosh, 89-94.

metropolitan areas in terms of abstract zones, corridors, and wedges of alternative uses. Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway appears in various guises as a vague green swath in the master plans and diagrams from this period. In 1967, during the rising tide of the ecology movement, University of Pennsylvania planner Ian McHarg applied his "physiographic determinism" to the Washington region, suggesting that natural systems should provide the basis for local planning decisions. McHarg's study presented the greater Washington area as a series of ecological regions, transforming Rock Creek's scenery into a collection of scientific overlays depicting the valley's underlying geology, soils, and plant life. It remains to be seen how the Greenway movement and the recent plannerly fascination with "Green Cities" will affect the perception and management of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Together with Rock Creek Park, the parkway provides an extensive expanse of centrally located natural habitat that few American cities can match.[34]

The City Beautiful

Another significant influence on the creation and design of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was the City Beautiful movement, whose supporters held much in common with the Progressive reform agenda of naturalistic park advocates. The basic assumption of the City Beautiful movement was that American cities were ugly, chaotic, and inefficient, and that coordinated design efforts based on European models could transform America cities into monuments of civic achievement worthy of a great and powerful nation. City Beautiful spokesmen urged architects, landscape architects, sculptors, artists, and businessmen to work together to improve the appearance of American cities. The shining example of the fruits of such cooperation was the monumental "White City" of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. Designed by a team of prominent artists and architects headed by Chicago architect Daniel Burnham, the grand neoclassical design of the White City convinced designers and civic leaders across the country of the power and prestige of "civic aesthetics."

According to Charles Mulford Robinson, whose 1903 hook, Modern Civic Art, or the City Made Beautiful was the bible of the City Beautiful movement, the goal of civic aesthetics was to improve American cities by building attractive new buildings and parks, thus ensuring that "whatever was dingy, coarse, and ugly, is either transformed or hidden in shadow."[35] Throughout the country, prominent architects and design committees produced elaborately rendered proposals for improving their cities. These plans called for the transformation of cities that had grown up haphazardly according to market forces and piecemeal improvements into coordinated designs that evoked the grandeur, elegance, order, and refinement of European capitals. Funding problems and local resistance caused many proposals to experience extensive delays and alterations. Taxpayer reservations kept some of the more ambitious City Beautiful plans from being realized. Yet the City

---

[34] A number of government agencies produced master plans for the Washington area in the 1950s and 1960s. These include: the U.S. National Capital Park and Planning Commission's Washington, Present and Future. A General Summary of A Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital and its Environs (1950), the U.S. National Capital Planning Commission's A Plan for the Year 2000 (1961), the U.S. National Capital Regional Planning Council's The Regional Development Guide, 1966-2000 (1966), and McHarg's Toward a Comprehensive Landscape Plan for Washington, D.C. (1967). Por a highly critical analysis of this era in planning history, see William H. Whyte, The Last Landscape (New York: Doubleday, 1968). Por more on Greenways, see Charles Little, Greenways for America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1990) and Daniel Smith and Paul Hellmund, eds., The Ecology of Greenways (to be published in 1993 by the University of Minnesota Press).

[35] Charles Mulford Robinson quoted in William H. Wilson, "The Ideology, Aesthetics, and Politics of the City Beautiful Movement," in The Rise of Modern Urban Planning, edited by Anthony Sutcliffe (New York: St. Martins, 1980), 175.

Beautiful movement transformed the appearance of many American cities between 1890 and 1940. City Beautiful ideas profoundly influenced the McMillan Commission's 1901-02 proposals for Washington, D.C., which provided the major impetus and basic plan for the development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway.[36]

Stylistically, the City Beautiful movement is usually associated with the ostentatious neoclassicism that characterized the contemporary treatment of public buildings and civic centers. City Beautiful advocates were concerned with shaping and beautifying the larger urban and suburban environment as a comprehensive whole, however. Most major City Beautiful plans contained provisions for extensive systems of outlying parks, parkways, and boulevards. Burnham's plans for San Francisco (1906) and Chicago (1909), Robinson's designs for Denver (1906) and Honolulu (1906), and John Nolen's recommendations for San Diego (1909) and Reading, Pennsylvania (1910) all called for a variety of formal and informal parks uniting different areas of the city and its suburbs.[37] The 1901-02 McMillan Commission plan presented Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway as an essential component of the larger system of formal and informal parks. The commission's original conception called for the parkway itself to encapsulate the entire transition from formal cityscape to informal natural landscape. As initially planned, the parkway was expected to traverse the Potomac waterfront along a distinctly urban system of quays and viaducts. As it entered the creek valley at Virginia Avenue, the raised driveway was to come down off an arched causeway and lead into a picturesque parkway winding along a creek bed flanked by formal boulevards on either side of the valley. Upon reaching the National Zoo, the lower drive would ford Rock Creek and enter the sylvan confines of Rock Creek Park.[38]

The City Beautiful's monumental neoclassical buildings, grand formal spaces, and informal parks were understood as essential elements of a broader program of social reform, not just as arbitrary aesthetic preferences for Beaux Arts architecture, grand plazas, and extensive landscape parks. According to the theories of environmental determinism that shaped the growing science of urban sociology, people were products of their physical surroundings. Replacing slums and urban congestion with refined and elegant surroundings, it was hoped, would help turn the threatening characters of Stephen Crane's Maggie: A Girl of the Streets or Jacob Riis's How The Other Half Lives into refined and elegant citizens.[39] City Beautiful promoters also reminded the business community that beautiful cities were profitable cities. They claimed that money spent on urban improvements would repay itself many times over by attracting desirable businesses and increasing real estate values. Daniel Burnham wooed the business community's support for his grand urban

---

[36] U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on the District of Columbia. Report of the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia on the Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia. Edited by Charles Moore. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902). This document is often referred to as the McMillan Commission Report, and will be cited as such hereafter.

[37] Wilson, "The Ideology, Aesthetics, and Politics of the City Beautiful Movement," 176-83.

[38] McMillan Commission Report, 83-89, 137-42.

[39] Stephen Crane's Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (1893) told the story of a poor young girl whose slum surroundings doomed her to a short life of disappointment, violence, and sin. Jacob Riis's How The Other Half Lives (1890) used photographs and a reportorial style display the lives of New York City slum dwellers.

designs by asserting that "beauty has always paid better than any other commodity and always will."[40]

The desire to upgrade Washington's image to that of a world-class capital city, the imperative to replace unsightly industrial areas and substandard housing with healthful and edifying parkland, and the prospect of increased land values and general economic revitalization to be derived from these improvements, were all aspects of the City Beautiful movement that strongly influenced the development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway.

The Evolution of the Landscape Design Profession

Another important influence on the development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was the professionalization of landscape design. Tracing the evolution of the parkway's design and management provides an insightful perspective on the transformation of city planning and landscape architecture from the elite province of a few eclectically trained individuals to a largely anonymous bureaucratic process. The history of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway epitomizes the transition from the view of the urban designer as visionary artist striving after symbolic and aesthetic ideals to a more pragmatic program in which teams of planners combined the functions of engineers, economists, and sociologists to devise efficient systems aimed at minimizing conflicts and maximizing the flow of goods, services, and people.

During its formative years in the mid nineteenth century, landscape architecture was presented as a largely intuitive undertaking. Horace Cleveland's pronouncement that landscape design was "an art demanding the exercise of ingenuity, judgment, and taste" exemplified the nineteenth-century perception of the landscape architect as a broadly educated and highly cultured artist.[41] According to this paradigm, the landscape architect was a refined individual who wandered about in the field, made aesthetic judgments based on established canons of landscape beauty, and then returned to the studio, where he or his subordinates elaborated the vision in lavishly rendered drawings and eloquent prose. Well into the first few decades of the twentieth century, prominent landscape architects viewed their field as a sweeping domain that encompassed everything from large-scale city planning to the minute specification of planting schemes and grade treatments. This operatic sweep began to narrow in the 1920s, when city planning started to define itself as a profession distinct from both architecture and landscape architecture. As the broader design of parks and cities began to pass into the hands of technocrats concerned less with physical form than with statistical analysis and policy formation, landscape architects were increasingly relegated to the subordinate role of cosmetically beautifying open spaces decreed by abstract planning processes.[42]

The changes in the design and management of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway reveal the gradual professionalization of landscape architecture and urban design, along with the corresponding

---

[40] Quoted in Wilson, "The Ideology, Aesthetics, and Politics of the City Beautiful Movement," 172.

[41] Cleveland quoted in Theodora Kimball Cleveland, "H.W.S. Cleveland: An American Pioneer in Landscape Architecture and City Planning," Landscape Architecture 20 (January 1930): 100.

[42] Newton, Design on the Land, 424.

transformation from the hands-on participation of high-profile individuals to the bureaucratic production of quasi-scientific directives by teams of institutionally accredited engineers, social scientists, and planners. In the case of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, the shifting terminology of park-related legislation reveals this institutional transformation. In 1866, before landscape architects had established their professional credentials, the Senate resolution authorizing a report on the potential development of Rock Creek Park called for "a practical landscape gardener or topographical engineer" to undertake the study.[43] In 1900, a year after the founding of the American Society of Landscape Architects and the same year that Harvard introduced America's first university curriculum in landscape architecture, Congress authorized a study for the potential development of the lower Rock Creek Valley that specifically stipulated that "a landscape architect of conspicuous ability in his profession" be hired to undertake the design.[44] During the next thirty years professional landscape architects including Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., John Greenleaf, and Charles Eliot II played prominent roles on the various commissions that oversaw Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway's design and development.[45] The engineer's studied pragmatism regained the upper hand after World War II, however, with the dominance of traffic engineers and city planners as the primary arbiters of urban form through the creation of voluminous but frequently vague master plans. The rise of Modern architecture, with its minimalist aesthetic and devotion to the principle that "form follows function," also served to diminish the role of classically trained landscape architects and helped cast romantic landscape design as an outdated affectation. Even a brief glance at the difference in professional visions of the parkway between plans drawn in 1916 and 1961 demonstrates the broad shift from the pursuit of the City Beautiful to the planning of the City Functional.

Parkways

The rise and fall of the parkway as a distinct design type epitomized the transformation of the landscape design profession, and vividly illustrated the impact of new dimensions of speed, scale, and technical prowess on the development of the American landscape. Gracefully curving tree-lined parkways first appeared in American cities toward the end of the nineteenth century. They combined the utility of existing formal boulevards with some of the picturesque qualities found in the pleasure drives and pathways of romantic landscape parks. With the proliferation of the automobile in the 1910s-20s, parkways rapidly developed from the intimate confines and circuitous routes typified by Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and the original sections of the Bronx River Parkway to the sweeping curves and broader vistas of the Long Island and Westchester County parkway systems, eventually evolving into the even more expansive Taconic and Merritt parkways. After World War II, a second expansion of speed, scale, and engineering proficiency produced the safe, efficient, but visually bland toll roads and interstate highway system, and threatened to replace historically significant earlier designs with high-speed, high-volume urban expressways.

---

[43] 36 Congressional Globe 3894, quoted in Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park, 2.

[44] Sundry Civil Act of June 6. 1900, Pub. 163, 56th Congress, 31 Stat. 622., quoted in Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park, 48.

[45] Olmsted, Greenleaf, and other members of the Commission of Fine Arts frequently criticized what they perceived as unprofessional or inartistic design and management practices by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who were officially responsible for Rock Creek Park and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway during most of this period.

The spacious boulevards that served fashionable new residential districts in cities like Boston, Cleveland, Richmond, and Chicago were modeled on European prototypes. Berlin's Unter den Linden, Vienna's Ringstrasse, and Haussmann's Parisian avenues provided models for the image of dignity and exclusivity sought by American civic leaders and real estate developers.[46] While the terms "boulevard," "avenue," and "parkway" were used somewhat interchangeably in the late nineteenth century, they generally referred to broad, tree-lined streets linking civic centers with affluent residential areas and major parks. These formal boulevards consisted of one or more traffic lanes bordered with grassy pedestrian promenades and straight rows of evenly spaced trees. The more elaborate contained a central roadway for through traffic flanked by smaller lanes providing access to bordering residences.

Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., and his partner Calvert Vaux are credited with introducing the term parkway to refer to tree-lined boulevards intended primarily for pleasure traffic. In their 1868 proposal for Brooklyn's Prospect Park, they suggested connecting the new park with other sections of the city through "a series of ways designed with express reference to the pleasure with which they may be used for walking, riding, and driving carriages; for rest, recreation, refreshment, and social intercourse."[47] Olmsted and Vaux promoted these "park-ways" as key elements of an inter-connected citywide park system. They also contended that the proposed parkways would serve as convenient traffic arteries, improve surrounding real estate values, and act as fire breaks to prevent the major conflagrations that still imperiled American cities. Primarily though, Olmsted and Vaux touted the recreational value of the proposed parkways. They claimed that connecting Central and Prospect parks via attractive boulevards "would enable a carriage to be driven on the half of a summer's day, through the most interesting parts both of the city of Brooklyn and New York, through their most attractive and characteristic suburbs, and through their great parks."[48]

Though termed parkways, the actual designs for the proposed Brooklyn parkways were not significantly different from existing urban boulevards. Olmsted and Vaux's Brooklyn plan called for two grand, 260' wide approaches to Prospect Park, designated Ocean Parkway and Jamaica Parkway (soon renamed "Eastern Parkway"). They consisted of a central roadway flanked by three rows of evenly spaced trees. The center lane was segregated from surrounding local traffic and reserved for pleasure vehicles. It was bordered on either side by grass strips, pedestrian walkways, and subsidiary roads for commercial traffic and access to bordering residences. While the Brooklyn plans received

---

[46] "Boulevard" is a French word deriving from an old term for the fortifications that surrounded the central districts of many European cities. As these cities expanded, they recognized that the outdated fortifications could be converted into attractive parks and roadways. Vienna's Ringstrasse is the most prominent example of this practice. After touring Europe for ideas about how to redesign Washington, the McMillan Commission proposed to create an expanded, Americanized version of the Ringstrasse. The Commission recommended linking the abandoned Civil War forts surrounding Washington to create a forested circumferential parkway. A number of these forts were eventually preserved as individual parks, but "Fort Drive" itself was never completed. The long, straight avenues of Paris, after which many of the grand American avenues were built, also had military roots. They were configured to allow Napoleon III's soldiers to put down potential insurrections with unobstructed artillery fire. This feature was rarely advertised in their middle-class American applications. For a contemporary review of parkway history, see John C. Olmsted, "Classes of Parkways," Landscape Architecture 6 (October 1915): 38-48.

[47] Olmsted, Vaux and Company, "Report of the Landscape Architects and Superintendents to the President of the Board of Commissioners of Prospect Park, Brooklyn, 1868," quoted in Schuyler, The New Urban Landscape, 128.

[48] Olmsted, Vaux, and Company, "Preliminary Report to the Commissioners for Laying Out a Park in Brooklyn, New York, 1866," quoted in Schuyler, The New Urban Landscape, 127.

considerable publicity, economic problems associated with the Panic of 1873 delayed completion of Prospect Park and its parkways for over a decade.[49]

While Olmsted and Vaux were working on Prospect Park and its connections, Horace Cleveland was proposing a unified park system for Chicago. Cleveland's 1869 plan called for two major parks connected by a broad straight boulevard that would do double duty as an arboretum displaying as many trees as could be persuaded to grow in Chicago's harsh climate. The great fire of 1871 put Cleveland's plans on hold. Olmsted later resurrected Cleveland's basic idea, rejecting the arboretum as impractical and artificial, and making several other changes to accommodate Daniel Burnham's grand design for the World's Columbian Exposition. In the meantime, Olmsted and Vaux designed a park system for Buffalo that contained several connecting parkways, whose broadly curving forms began to hint at the serpentine routes of early motor parkways.[50]

The Metropolitan Park System that Olmsted and his protege, Charles Eliot, developed for Boston in the 1880-90s was even more suggestive of the picturesque landscapes of the first motor parkways. Olmsted's plan for Boston called for a carriage drive and pedestrian promenade linking the centrally located Common and Public Garden with the large suburban park he proposed for West Roxbury. While the initial segment made use of the formal boulevard of Commonwealth Avenue, the remainder of the drive followed the sinuous banks of the Muddy River to its source in Jamaica Pond, entering the romantically landscaped expanse of Franklin Park via a short curvilinear drive. Olmsted initially referred to this winding connection of walkways, bridle paths, and carriage drives as "The Promenade." The park commissioners termed it the "The Parkway" in their 1887 annual report, differentiating it into subsidiary sections called "Charlesgate," "Fenway," and "Riverway."[51]

The series of drives and bordering parkland that resulted from Olmsted's 1880 Boston plan, "Suggestion for the Improvement of Muddy River and for the Completion of a Continuous Promenade from the Common to Jamaica Pond" and his 1879 plan for the Back Bay Fens, redefined the basic conception of the parkway from an attractively landscaped but essentially urban avenue flanked by regular rows of trees to a naturalistic park containing a road as its principal design feature. While residential developments generally bordered one side of the Boston parkways, the user looked out on an informal linear park of varying width, which offered picturesque views of romantically sculpted waterways, meadows, and native vegetation. Olmsted believed that curving drives bordered by asymmetrical naturalistic plantings and irregular topography provided a therapeutic escape from the harsh geometries and hectic pace of the urban environment. Such gracefully winding parkways, Olmsted claimed, "suggest and imply leisure, contemplativeness, and happy tranquility" as opposed to "the ordinary directness of line of town streets, with its regularity [suggesting] eagerness to press forward, without looking to the right or left."[52]

---

[49] Schuyler, The New Urban Landscape, 127-128.

[50] Schuyler, The New Urban Landscape, 132-138; Francis Kowski, ed., The Best Planned City: The Olmsted Legacy in Buffalo (Buffalo, N.Y.: Burchfield Art Center, 1991).

[51] Boston Park Commissioners, Annual Report, 1887, 22, quoted in Newton, Design on the Land, 300; see also Cynthia Zaitzevsky, Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

[52] Quoted in Jackson, American Space, 79.

Olmsted's widely publicized work along Muddy River was the principal model for Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. An influential member of the McMillan Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts, his son Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., was intimately familiar with the Boston park system. He repeatedly referred to the development of Muddy River as a precedent for parkway development in general and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway in particular. The McMillan Commission's report on suggested improvements for the Washington park system made several references to the Riverway in its recommendations for the development of Rock Creek valley. The Commission of Fine Arts used photographs of Muddy River supplied by the Olmsted firm to advocate the parkway's development. Photographs of existing conditions in lower Rock Creek valley were juxtaposed with views of the Riverway, which was heralded as, "A telling example of what landscape architecture can accomplish." Viewers were asked to compare scenes of the degraded Rock Creek valley with the Boston project, and reminded that the lush, romantically configured Riverway landscape had been "a rather hopeless looking swampy stream" only a few years before.[53]

The similarity between the two projects was striking. Both were conceived as multiple-use parks enabling urban residents to partake in the leisurely enjoyment of natural surroundings, whether on foot or by horse or carriage. With the coming of the automobile and resultant expansion of suburban populations, however, both were transformed into commuter arteries whose original form and functions have often been forgotten and neglected. Reflecting governmental ambivalence toward the transformation of potentially taxable real estate into expensive public parks, both Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and Boston's Riverway encountered interminable administrative and funding difficulties that stretched the period from initial conception to completion over several decades. Olmsted began planning the Riverway in 1879, but the park system wasn't completed until the late 1890s.[54] Problems with legislation and appropriations delayed Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway's gestation even longer. Conceived at the end of the horse and buggy era--the first official government report on the parkway appeared in 1893, the same year the Duryea brothers produced the first practical American automobile--the parkway came to term during the 1920s, when the automobile was radically reshaping American life.[55]

The rapid rise of automobile ownership in the 1910-20s introduced new challenges for the parkway designer. As late as 1915, landscape architects still found it reasonable to include gravel or macadam roadbeds for horses in their parkway designs.[56] With a few notable exceptions, such as John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s carriage road system on Maine's Mount Desert Island, however, by the 1920s the automobile had become the vehicle of standard for parkway design. In a 1922 article in

---

[53] "Photographs: Rock Creek Parkway, Present Condition," loose-leaf notebook, Commission of Fine Arts library, Washington, D.C., 28.

[54] Newton, Design on the Land, 294-301.

[55] In 1893 District Engineer Commissioner Captain William T. Rossell submitted a report on the possibility of converting Rock Creek below Massachusetts Avenue into a covered sewer and filling in the valley to provide a base for a winding but essentially formal street-level boulevard. The Washington Board of Trade submitted proposals for a parkway running along the bottom of the open valley in 1889 and 1899; U.S. Congress. House. Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission: 1916 (H. Doc. 114, 64th Cong., 1st Session, 1916). The McMillan Commission discussed both potential treatments in its 1902 report. The extremely detailed 1908 Report upon Improvement of Rock Creek from Massachusetts Avenue to the Mouth of Rock Creek (Senate Doc. 458, 60th Congress, 1st Session) analyzed a variety of parkway design options while Henry Ford was still working the bugs out of his Model T.

[56] John C. Olmsted, "Classes of Parkways," 37-48.

Landscape Architecture, "The Influence of the Automobile on the Design of Park Roads," Charles Eliot II declared a new era in parkway design. "The passing of the horse-drawn vehicle and the constantly increasing use of automobiles," he wrote, "have made necessary a revaluation of the various factors in the design of park roads."[57]

The growing recreational use of automobiles transformed American's attitudes toward parks and parkways. As Eliot pointed out, motoring decreased the perceived size of urban parks by allowing people to drive through them at speeds that revealed their limited extent and counteracted the feeling of spaciousness earlier park designers had cultivated through the orchestration of expansive vistas such as Prospect Park's Long Meadow. Furthermore, the meandering carriage roads and bridle paths that helped foster the illusion of spaciousness seemed excessively contrived--and even dangerous--when experienced from behind the wheel of an automobile. Eliot felt that urban park roads should be reserved for pedestrians and equestrians. Motorists needed a new type of landscape, one suited to the distinctive requirements of the motor age.[58]

Eliot recognized that the speed of the motorcar necessitated a rethinking of the visual experience of the parkway. The motorist had no time to appreciate the subtle details and carefully staged vistas favored by landscape architects steeped in the traditions of romantic painting and English landscape garden art. In addition, the democratization of touring promoted by the affordability of the automobile broadened the audience for natural scenery to include classes that weren't educated in the finer points of landscape appreciation. The modern parkway designer thus needed to paint his designs in broader strokes and pay greater attention to the kinetic experience of landscape art.[59] Eliot claimed that:

> The automobile has . . . made necessary a broader treatment of views. Intimate and confined views cannot be appreciated from a fast moving vehicle; simplicity and breadth are required. Different views must not follow too closely upon one another, and the openings and vistas through bordering woods or shrubbery must be of far greater width. Every accent of the prospect and planting must be stronger because of the brief time in which it is seen. . . .[60]

---

[57] Charles Eliot, 2nd, "The Influence of the Automobile on the Design of Park Roads," Landscape Architecture 13 (October 1922): 27. See also Arthur A. Shurtleff, "The Effect of the Automobile on the Design of Parks," Landscape Architecture 11 (April 1921): 111-114.

[58] Eliot, "The Influence of the Automobile on the Design of Park Roads," 28-33.

[59] Neither of these tendencies were new with the automobile. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the rise of the railroads and the spread of affordable popular scenery books had greatly broadened the audience of natural scenery. Concomitantly, elitist fascination with complex notions of the "sublime," "beautiful," and "picturesque" that had served as the basis for early nineteenth-century landscape connoisseurship gave way to a more general appreciation of vaguely construed notions of picturesque scenery. Similarly, emphasis on the kinetic experience of landscape appeared with the rise of steamboats and long-distance canal travel in the 1830s-40s. Travelera wrote extensively of the novel sensation of slipping effortlessly through the American landscape by these means. Painted panoramas emulating this experience were tremendously popular attractions during this period.

Olmsted, Sr., acknowledged the passing of traditional static notions of landscape appreciation in his comments on the design of Franklin Park. He wrote that, "The roads of the park have been designed less with a purpose of bringing visitors to points of view at which they will enjoy set scenes or landscapes, than to provide for a constant mild enjoyment of simply pleasing rural scenery while in easy movement" (quoted in Eliot, "The Influence of the Automobile on the Design of Park Roads," 28). While not the original source of these changing attitudes toward landscape design and appreciation, the automobile greatly accelerated nascent developments.

[60] Eliot, "The Influence of the Automobile on the Design of Park Roads," 32.

Eliot maintained that the dominance of the automobile also changed the focal point of parkway design. While earlier parkway users could generally trust their horses to stay on course, motorists had to continually watch where they were going. "The view ahead of the automobile, down the road, has become of greater relative importance," Eliot wrote. Previously, the pedestrian, horse rider, or carriage driver moved at such a slow pace that relatively little attention had to be paid to the forward view. Since the pre-automobile parkway-user's gaze was free to wander from side to side, landscape architects had been able to develop their compositions to take advantage of lateral views that only marginally encompassed the road itself. The need of the motorist to pay constant attention to the view ahead made the landscape architect's job more difficult, Eliot maintained, since roads were not often inherently beautiful things. According to Eliot, the motorist's forward orientation meant that "The road vista, the sinuosity of curves, and the enframent of the view with suitable planting call for more careful design than was given in other days."[61]

Eliot outlined several specific changes in parkway design called for by the switch to fast-moving automobiles. Designers of motor parkways should try to minimize sharp curves and steep grades. They needed to avoid blind corners and intersections, and separate cross traffic with bridges or overpasses whenever possible. The practice of eliminating dangerous and inefficient intersections through grade separations had already proved successful in Olmsted's design for Central Park and had been employed in several of the grander boulevards such as Boston's Commonwealth Avenue. Unfortunately, such concessions to the increased speed of automobile traffic required greater manipulation of the existing topography in the form of extensive cutting and filling. Eliot advocated separating parkways into independent one-way lanes to reduce the need for such unsightly and expensive excavation. Eliot noted that the automobile also gave parkway designers new-found freedom to seek out attractive scenery. The speed of the automobile overcame earlier arguments that longer routes should singlemindedly follow the straightest line between two points. Unlike formal avenues and traditional highways and turnpikes, the parkway could "properly be quite indirect if by so locating it a pleasanter route is followed." Approving of the practice of many early motor parkway designers, Eliot suggested that "a brook or ridge may be followed because of the attractiveness of the route."[62]

Eliot foresaw the changing character of the motor parkway and accurately forecast its future role as a boon to commuters and suburban real estate developers. Characterizing the parkway's traditional role in the urban landscape as the provision of recreational routes connecting parks with each other and with the city center, he identified commuting as the major factor in future parkway development.[63] Eliot was remarkably insightful and pragmatic in his assessment of the effects of the automobile on parkway design. He did not, however, view the changes wrought by the automobile as altogether sanguine. Eliot saw the transformation of the parkway as emblematic of a more general erosion of genteel nineteenth-century standards of taste and beauty. "The influence of the automobile on the design of park roads is typical of the general trend of our times," Eliot claimed:

---

[61] Eliot, "The Influence of the Automobile on the Design of Park Roads," 32.

[62] Eliot, "The Influence of the Automobile on the Design of Park Roads," 33-36.

[63] Eliot, "The Influence of the Automobile on the Design of Park Roads," 33-36.

> The rush of modern life is typified in the speed of the automobile. A premium has been put on the obvious and broad handling of all subjects of design. Just as in the movies, the rapidity of the events pictured has made necessary gross exaggeration of details, so the speed of the automobile now requires a coarse, broad treatment of scenery. The enjoyment of the intimate details of the scenery, acting, and other artistic productions is dependent on close observation, and in our times most people have neither the time nor the patience to seek out the finer and less obvious beautiful things.[64]

While Eliot viewed the automobile as emblematic of the corrosive effects of modern industrial society, many of his contemporaries applauded the motor car as a means of escaping the pressures of twentieth-century urban life. The appeal of recreational driving as a temporary release from workaday routines was a key element in fostering the rapid proliferation of early motor parkways. The prospect of driving through the countryside on paved roads may not strike today's observer as an anti-modernist activity, but in the early years of motoring, advertisers and popular writers cast recreational driving as a means of escaping the city, partaking in healthy outdoor activity, and touching base with America's rural past. Motoring in scenic surroundings theoretically allowed over-regimented urbanites to experience nature and to feel independent and adventuresome--traditional American virtues that many people felt were in danger of disappearing from the post-frontier American character. "Sunday driving" was an enormously popular pastime during the 1920s, as was the more ambitious project of autocamping. The motoring experience was vastly different in those days, of course. Until the mid 1920s, most cars were open touring models. The standard Model-T topped out at about 50 mph, and parkway speed limits were often considerably lower, in the neighborhood of 25-35 mph. Motorists on the early parkways were thus on more intimate terms with their surroundings, and could realistically claim to be experiencing nature in a way that modern drivers scarcely imagine. The initial speed limits on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway were set between 22 and 30 mph. Driving through Rock Creek valley at this speed--as one still does on many stretches of Beach Drive in Rock Creek Park--produced a significantly heightened awareness of the surrounding landscape.[65]

The Bronx River Parkway was the first public parkway containing a road designed solely for automobile use. This much-heralded roadway, however, was actually an afterthought added on to a more broadly conceived park initiative. When the Bronx River Parkway was first proposed in 1905, it was conceived primarily as a means of controlling pollution along the Bronx River. By the turn of the century, the Bronx River had become lined with houses, whose privies often stood right at the banks of the stream. Together with industrial pollutants, these abuses had fouled the Bronx River to the point where it posed a threat to wildlife downstream in the Bronx Zoo. Concerned citizens pressured the New York legislature to create a commission authorized to study the prospect of turning the banks of the Bronx River into an elongated public park. Unlike the proposals for Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, where carriage roads were integral to the original design, the initial plans simply incorporated existing roadways and made no mention of constructing a special driveway in the park. The Bronx Parkway Commission concentrated instead on acquiring the river valley and restoring it to

---

[64] Eliot, "The Influence of the Automobile on the Design of Park Roads," 37.

[65] For more on the history and "anti-modernist" implications of automobile touring, see Warren Belasco, Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979).

a more natural condition. Over the course of the commission's deliberations the idea emerged of using the rejuvenated river valley to provide a scenic drive from Bronx Park to the attractively landscaped reservation surrounding the Kensico Dam and reservoir. In 1907, when the commission submitted its first report, the automobile was still an expensive luxury, so this provision represented a substantial commitment of public funds for a road that would largely benefit well-to-do owners of pleasure vehicles and suburban real estate.[66]

After a lengthy process of land acquisition and scenic rehabilitation, construction on the Bronx River Parkway began in 1916. World War I intervened, delaying the parkway's completion until 1923. The popular and professional press hailed the new parkway as a major achievement in roadbuilding and park development. The fifteen miles of the original Bronx River Parkway, stretching from the Bronx Zoo to Kensico Reservoir, employed most of the design elements that helped define the pre-World War II motor parkway. The chief distinguishing features were the exclusion of commercial traffic such as trucks and buses (even though it stretched beyond the traditional dimensions of the public park, the motor parkway was still conceived as a recreational environment), the separation of cross-traffic by means of attractively designed overpasses, the limitation of access to widely spaced and carefully controlled entrance and exit points, and skillful attention to road alignment and landscaping so as to provide a varied and attractive visual experience while screening out unsightly views. More than 30,000 trees were planted along the Bronx River Parkway to enhance the motorist's sense of seclusion among forested surroundings.[67] Landscape architect Herman Merkel, the parkway's original designer, envisioned two separate roadways snaking their way through the valley on either side of a landscaped median of varying width. This treatment would have followed the existing topography more closely and enhanced both the safety and scenic quality of the resulting parkway, but separated lanes dictated a broader right-of-way and higher construction costs. The Bronx River Parkway Commission voted for a single roadway with minimal use of median strips. Like its contemporary, the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, most of the Bronx River Parkway was a relatively narrow four-lane road accommodating undivided two-way traffic. The original fifteen miles of the Bronx River Parkway had only two small sections of divided roadway.[68]

The Bronx River Parkway was tremendously successful, both as a recreational road and as a commuter thoroughfare. In fact, the Bronx River Parkway didn't just serve commuters, it created them. With the new parkway providing convenient and attractive access to New York City, formerly remote areas of Westchester County experienced a major real estate boom. This parkway-driven

---

[66] Newton, Design on the Land, 598-600. The class bias of automobile ownership and parkway-related real estate patterns led William T. Lyle to conclude in his 1916 book, Parks and Park Engineering, that "Drives, parkways and boulevards will principally benefit the wealthy" (quoted in Frank B. Burggraf, "The Development of the Geometric Design of Parkways," in Parkways; Past, Present, and Future: Proceedings of the Second Biennial Linear Parks Conference (Boone, N.C.: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1987).

Given the cost of maintaining private carriages or bridle horses and the amount of leisure time needed to use these conveyances for suburban excursions, parkways were essentially elitist contrivances long before the advent of the automobile. In fact, the wide availability of cheap new and second-hand automobiles by the 1920s, together with shorter work-weeks for working and middle-class Americans, made motor parkways more democratic than their nineteenth-century precedents. During the peak of the parkway movement in the 1920s and 1930s, motoring provided access to the countryside and independent freedom of movement to an unprecedented number of Americans.

[67] Patton, Open Road, 69.

[68] Tunnard and Pushkarev, Man-made America, 161-62.

prosperity stimulated suburban realtors and civic boosters to advocate the construction of similar attractively landscaped, limited-access commuter roads to benefit their own localities. Soon Westchester County and southern Long Island were in the midst of a parkway-building craze. Westchester County alone had 160 miles of parkways by 1930, including the Saw Mill River Parkway, the Hutchinson Parkway, and the Cross Country Parkway. Gilmore Clarke, the landscape architect in charge of the Westchester County parkway system, extended the Bronx River Parkway northward, incorporating the latest advances in parkway design. Between Kensico Reservoir and Bear Mountain Bridge on the Hudson River the Bronx River Parkway's curves open up into longer, sweeping arcs, the right-of-way broadens, and the roadway separates into north- and southbound lanes that pursue separate paths around a landscaped median of varying width. According to many parkway aficionados, the culmination of this era in highway design--when landscape architects played a major role in laying out parkways for optimum scenic effect--was reached with the construction of the Taconic Parkway. Conceived in the early 1930s as a northern extension of the Bronx River Parkway, with construction continuing into the 1950s, the Taconic Parkway gracefully winds its way through rural Putnam County and on through the more rugged scenery of Dutchess and Columbia counties.[69]

The evolution of parkways from boulevards and park roads serving essentially urban populations to major commuting thoroughfares comprising key elements of regional transportation networks stemmed largely from the widespread belief that existing highways and commuting roads were a collective disaster that was stifling urban development and keeping Americans from enjoying the full freedoms of the automobile age.[70] Landscape architects, transportation planners, scenery aesthetes, and the popular press attacked conventional roadways as ugly, outdated, and unsafe. New speeds and old roads made the 1920s the deadliest decade ever in terms of fatalities per passenger mile.[71] Parkway proponents emphasized the dangers presented by the high number of commercial establishments that fronted conventional roadways. Uncontrolled turning and entering traffic was a major source of accidents. Limited-access parkways with well-designed exits and entrances promised to greatly reduce the number of accidents associated with this hazard. Parkway advocates also decried the visual cacophony of unrestricted roadside development as not only unsightly, and an affront to public taste, but dangerous as well. They accused the eye-catching gimmicks of roadside merchants of causing accidents, and complained that the profusion of billboards and tawdry roadside developments made it nearly impossible for motorists to find unspoiled rural scenery. The parkway's broad right-of-way and carefully screened viewsheds shielded motorists from such objectionable sights and dangers. Parkway advocates also claimed that, contrary to the assertions of traditional highway advocates, the winding routes of parkways were actually cheaper to build than straight roads, since they could easily bend to avoid high-priced land and costly excavations. They also noted that limited-

---

[69] Newton, Design on the Land, 608-610; Tunnard and Pushkarev, Man-Made America, 161-68; Patton, Open Road, 69-73.

[70] The push for parkways in the 1920s-30s was also fueled by good old-fashioned greed and self-interest. Civic boosters, suburban real estate speculators, and zealous regional development promoters like New York's parks and transportation czar Robert Moses played an enormous role in securing funding and legislation to support parkway projects, and in determining precisely where the new parkways were constructed.

[71] According to road historian Phil Patton, there were eighteen fatalities per million miles in the late 1920s, compared to five per million by 1960s (Patton, Open Road, 66); Charles A. Glover, Director of Research for the Travel Research Association, also labeled the 1920s as the most deadly decade for motorists, citing a death rate of 16 per 100 million miles (Charles C. Glover, "The Challenge of the New Highway Program," in The Highway and the Landscape, edited by Brewster Snow (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1959), 56-73).

access roads that bypassed congested areas were more efficient, because they avoided the congestion produced by conventional routes passing through the centers of small towns.[72]

The desire for safety and efficiency pointed the way to the next major development in highway design: the freeway. Edward M. Bassett, a lawyer who served as president of the National Conference on City Planning, coined the term "freeway" in 1930. According to Bassett, a freeway was "a strip of land dedicated to *movement*, over which the owner has no right of light, air, or access." A parkway was a similar strip of restricted-access land devoted to recreation.[73] The rise of the freeway was an indication of the way motoring had changed from the days when pleasure driving was the primary motivation for parkway construction, and parkways were conceived primarily as extensions of park road systems. By 1930 driving was no longer a novelty. The automobile was well on its way to being regarded as a necessity of modern life, rather than as a romantic escape to a simpler rural past. Anything that slowed down or imperiled the motorist's forward progress--such as the tightly curving undivided roadways of early parkways--was not only a practical inconvenience, but a symbolic impediment to achieving the fruits of citizenship in a modern industrial nation. As pressure rose to interconnect the nation with a comprehensive highway system, it also became increasingly difficult to advocate expending large amounts of tax dollars on roadways that prohibited trucks and commercial traffic. Parkways had their place in scenic regions like upstate New York or as routes to and through state and national parks, but what the modern motorist needed--according to transportation planning experts--were modern, high-speed freeways designed for modern, high-speed life.

With the stock market crash of 1929 and the onslaught of the Depression, movement and efficiency seemed far more important than leisure and recreation, both in the design of roads and in the reorganization of society as a whole. Narrow, circuitous parkways with romantic plantings and ornamental bridges appeared fussy and irrational: sources of friction to those who envisioned a

---

[72] Gilmore D. Clarke, the chief landscape architect behind the Westchester parkway system and the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, and adviser to Robert Moses on many of the Long Island and Manhattan parkways, was a prominent advocate of improved parkways. He expressed his views in numerous speeches and articles, including "Some Views of Highway Design," an unpublished paper presented before the Association of Highway Officials of the North Atlantic States, February 13. 1936; "Westchester Parkways: An American Development in Landscape Architecture," Landscape Architecture 28 (October 1937): 40-41, and "The Parkway Idea," in Brewster Snow, ed., The Highway and the Landscape (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1959). George D. Hall's "The 'Freeway': A New Thought for Subdividers," Landscape Architecture 21 (January 1931): 115-18, detailed contemporary arguments for limited-access parkways. Wilbur Simonson set out basic principles for scenic parkway design in a series of articles in Landscape Architecture. These included "Planning for Roadside Improvement," Landscape Architecture 23 (July 1933): 247-257; "Some Desirable Policies in Roadside Development," Landscape Architecture 24 (January 1934): 91-99; and "The Roadside Picture: A Hindrance to Traffic? Or an Inspiring Asset to Travel?" Landscape Architecture 30 (October 1939): 26-36.

Popular magazines such as Life took up the call for safer, more attractive highways, sending famed photographer Margaret Bourke-White to photograph roadside clutter along U.S. Route 1. An outraged Life declared, "The nation that lives on wheels, still has the dubious honor of having created, along 3,000,000 miles of highway, the supreme honky-tonk of all time" (quoted in Patton, Open Road, 66-67).

Not everyone was enthralled with parkways, however. In 1944, Landscape Architecture wryly quoted a New York Times Magazine writer who complained:

> Parkways are so perfect, they're inhuman. Miles and miles of scenery--trees, fences, walls, bridges--and never a town, never a house by the side of the road, friendly to man, never a lively billboard to relieve the dreary monotony. A parkway is like a night in the upper berth, something to be endured and gotten through with, the quicker the better."
>
> ("Parkways," Landscape Architecture 35 (October 1944): 15).

[73] Edward M. Bassett, "The Freeway--A New Kind of Thoroughfare," American City 42 (February 1930): 95; see also George D. Hall, "The 'Freeway': A New Thought for Subdividers," Landscape Architecture 21 (January 1931): 115-118.

streamlined, efficiently functioning metropolis, and prime examples of the bourgeois extravagance of Victorian design to adherents of the new "form follows function" theories of Modern architecture.[74] Industrial designer Norman Bel Geddes, one of the founders of the industrial design movement that promoted the streamlined aesthetic, proclaimed in his 1932 book Horizons that, "A freeflowing movement of people and goods across our nation is a requirement of modern living and prosperity."[75] Bel Geddes argued that good industrial design would make America a better and more stimulating society. Bigger, larger, more efficient modern freeways designed according to engineering principles and unconstrained by outmoded nineteenth-century aesthetic notions would streamline the flow of goods, people, ideas, and services across the country, eliminating the friction that kept America from realizing its true potential. Bel Geddes presented a thrilling vision of his magic motorways in the diorama he designed for General Motors' Futurama exhibit at the 1939 World's Fair. Bel Geddes' diorama portrayed his vision of how the United States would look in 1960. One of the most striking features of his model was its superhighway network, which connected towering modern cities with an efficient and exhilarating system of beltways, regional connectors, and superhighways.

The general public didn't have to wait long to see how Bel Geddes' futuristic designs would look in practice. The Pennsylvania Turnpike opened in 1940. Billed by its promoters as "America's Dream Highway," it provided a nearly straight shot from Harrisburg to Pittsburgh. Unlike parkways, which prohibited trucks and other commercial vehicles, the Pennsylvania Turnpike was open to all traffic and immediately became an important commercial route. The Pennsylvania Turnpike used such parkway innovations as limited access, elimination of cross traffic, and separation of oncoming traffic with medians, but concern for efficiency over scenic qualities made the Pennsylvania Turnpike a dubious advancement in the highway designer's art, at least in the minds of most landscape architects. Despite its endless straightaways, narrow medians, and infrequent but relatively sharp curves, "America's Dream Highway" quickly became a model for other states seeking high-speed modern highways of their own. World War II slowed the pace of highway construction, but after the war American highway builders generally forsook the parkway model and concentrated on building utilitarian freeways for mixed traffic, with the Pennsylvania Turnpike serving as the paradigm for both construction and finance.[76]

---

[74] Ironically, just as high-speed freeways in the form of German autobahns and the dreams of forward-thinking American transportation planners were making the original concept of the slow-paced recreational parkway obsolete, massive federal funding for Depression relief projects enabled parkway planners to realize many of their long-delayed designs. The New Deal embraced parkways as a major element of its public works programs. Parkway construction could employ large numbers of relatively unskilled laborers while also promoting pride in America's natural beauty. Federally sponsored parkways stretched into and between cities. Many led to and through state and national parks. Skyline Drive and the Blue Ridge Parkways were constructed largely with federal funds. Mount Vernon Memorial Highway served as a commuter road while also providing convenient and attractive access to Mount Vernon. Assistance from the PWA, WPA and CCC was vital to the completion of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway.

[75] Quoted in Patton, Open Road, 125. The promotion of industrial design and streamlining as a means-and-metaphor for improving the efficiency of American society is developed at length in Jeffrey L. Meikle, Twentieth Century Limited: Industrial Design in America, 1925-1939 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979).

[76] Notable exceptions to the concern with efficiency and cost-savings over aesthetic quality were the 1953 Bureau of Public Road's showpiece Baltimore-Washington Parkway, with its broad medians, attractive landscaping, and gracefully flowing curves, and the northernmost portion of the Taconic Parkway, designed by Charles J. Baker of the New York State Department of Public Works from 1940-50, and considered by many highway experts as America's most outstanding example of scenic highway design. The attractive George Washington Memorial Parkway, stretching along Virginia's Potomac palisades from Arlington Memorial Bridge to the Capital Beltway was completed in the 1960s and was one of the last major parkways built in the United States.

Landscape architects were extremely disappointed with the direction road building took in the postwar years. Their major complaint was that landscape architects were being left out of the design process. Engineers had become the primary shapers of the American highway landscape. Landscape architects worried that they had become mere cosmeticians, charged with beautifying poorly conceived roads through superficial applications of planting and greenery. City and regional planners usurped the landscape architects' authority over broader location and design issues, while highway engineers increasingly made the crucial decisions regarding road alignment and grading. Since these determinations were made largely on the basis of utilitarian concerns, postwar highways often lacked the fundamental concern for scenic values that distinguished prewar parkways. Even such basic concessions as breaking up long straightaways with broadly sweeping spiral curves rarely appeared in engineers' highway designs until the mid 1950s. Engineers viewed spiral curves as exorbitant and inefficient affectations, suited to recreational parkways, perhaps, but not to the businesslike imperative of modern freeways.[77]

A number of articles condemning the exclusion of landscape architects from meaningful participation in the design of contemporary highways appeared in Landscape Architecture during the 1940s-50s. Criticizing the Pennsylvania Turnpike's single-minded pursuit of engineering efficiency, Gilmore Clarke complained, "When will engineers learn that there is more than one way to accomplish a given task?" He argued that design features like wide, varying medians and independent roadways contributed to safety as well as beauty. He insisted that spiral curves, for example, were not just cosmetic improvements, but actually safer than long straight sections. The shifting alignments required constant attention, and thus countered the deadly "highway hypnosis" that tended to plague motorists on the mind-numbing straight stretches of new thruways. Clarke's 1942 article attacked the shortsightedness of engineers, but he also castigated landscape architects for not learning enough about the technical aspects of road-building to inspire the respect of highway engineers and thus reassert their influence on the design of major highway projects.[78]

In 1958, as the federal interstate highway program shifted into high gear, Landscape Architecture editor Grady Clay assessed the relationship between engineers and landscape architects in much the same terms. He complained of the unequal power relationship between the two disciplines, pointing out that highway engineers "seem to have been elevated into positions where they can tell us what they want, rather than how to get what we want." Like Clarke, he criticized landscape architects for neglecting to learn the technical fundamentals that would enable them to play a larger role in highway design. Clay's comments appeared in a collection of essays whose title, "New Highways: Number One Enemy? Ten Specialists View (Some With Alarm) the Highway Program," revealed the point to which the highway debate had progressed. U.S. Bureau of Public Roads engineer Frederick Cron contributed a companion piece presenting the engineer's side of the story. Cron expressed hope that the spirit of cooperation would soon replace a regrettable period of antipathy and mutual recrimination, when "The engineers thought the landscape architects were

---

[77] Patton, Open Road, 131-133.

[78] Gilmore Clarke, "Beauty, A Wanting Factor in the Turnpike Design," Landscape Architecture 32 (January 1942): 53-54. Similar sentiments appeared in the following articles: Harlean James, "Tendency to View Landscape Contribution as Final Step," Landscape Architecture 30 (April 1940): 117-18; Herbert Hare, "Beauty Designed into the Highway, Not Added Superficially," Landscape Architecture 30 (April 1940): 118; Jac L. Gubbels, "A Part of the Organization, Not an Added Luxury," Landscape Architecture 30 (April 1940): 119; and Laurie Cox, "Appearance: Essential Element in Highway Design," Landscape Architect 32 (January 1942): 55-56.

running up the cost of the work with unnecessary extras; and the landscape architects were convinced that the engineers were out to get the cheapest construction cost regardless of how much the landscape was butchered." While welcoming landscape architects back into the fold, Cron steadfastly maintained that engineers should have the final say in basic design matters.[79]

By the postwar era, the science of road-building had made great technical advances since the days when parkway designers like Clarke, Olmsted, and the Blue Ridge Parkway's Stanley Abbott tramped around in the woods laying out scenic routes according to their intuitive readings of local terrain. Highway engineers increasingly relied on published construction standards developed through extensive tests conducted in engineering schools and highway departments across the country. While landscape architects like Olmsted and Clarke had emphasized personally fitting roads to existing sites, highway engineers increasingly designed from a distance, depending on aerial photographs, maps, destination surveys, and calculations of projected traffic needs. Traffic volumes and destination surveys, rather than scenic values, became the primary determinants of freeway design. New materials and powerful new road-building machinery ensured that roads could be constructed virtually anywhere the highway engineers and planners wanted them to go.[80]

Another crucial influence on postwar highway development was that, by the 1950s, urban planning had developed into a powerful profession.[81] Bolstered by statistical studies and rapidly growing bureaucracies, postwar planners greatly expanded earlier efforts to use roadways as large-scale redevelopment tools. Ironically, many 1950s city planners seemed to be essentially "anti-city." They viewed parkways and freeways not as potential urban amenities in themselves, but as means of allowing people to escape the city as easily as possible. Their urban-renewal proposals reflected the combined influence of traditional American beliefs that the city was an undesirable place to live and Modernist visions of the city of the future as an array of soaring towers surrounded by serpentine freeways and generic open space. Regional development plans often called for the replacement of densely settled urban areas with massive expressways that would theoretically transport their former inhabitants to and from suburban dream lands. The ideal city was like a wagon wheel, with a commercial hub and spokes of high-speed traffic arteries delivering commuters to healthy suburban communities interconnected by a circumferential beltway. These spokes generally followed the lines of least resistance, running through poorer districts or along the undeveloped fingers of existing parklands. An "inner loop" expressway frequently ringed the hub to provide access between downtown sectors. This configuration appeared in several postwar master plans for Washington, in which Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway appeared as an attractively undeveloped corridor ripe for the placement of radial commuter routes and crosstown connectors.

---

[79] Grady Clay, "The Tiger Is Through The Gate," Landscape Architecture 49 (Autumn 1958): 79-82; Frederick W. Cron, "Can Engineers Cooperate? Yes!" Landscape Architecture 49 (Autumn 1958): 82-83. These two essays highlighted a reassessment of the nation's road building program headlined, "New Highways: Number One Enemy? Ten Specialists View (Some With Alarm) the Highway Program," Landscape Architecture 49 (Autumn 1958): 79-97.

[80] See Patton, Open Road, 131-51, and Burggraf, "The Development of the Geometric Design of Parkways," in Parkways: Past, Present, and Future.

[81] The professionalization of city planning diminished the role of the landscape architect as a significant influence on urban form in much the same way that the development of highway engineering had pushed landscape architects to the sidelines of highway development. In both cases, landscape architects went from being significant influences on the entire design process to caretakers of whatever green spaces remained after larger functional concerns were met.

While some cities occasionally attempted to design new commuter arteries with attention to the aesthetic concerns reflected in earlier parkways, many urban expressways built in the 1950s-60s were characterless concrete megastructures that cut indiscriminately across residential areas and parks. After the creation of the Interstate Highway system in 1956, cities became eligible for generous subsidies from federal highway funds if they agreed to incorporate their expressways into the system and build them according to federal highway standards. This infusion of what Grady Clay characterized as "more public money to spend than any non-atomic profession ever had in peacetime," provided a powerful enticement to design bigger, faster commuter arteries and reconstruct older roads according to modern design standards.[82] The Cold War provided a further inducement to promote speed and efficiency over scenic values. Expressways were advertised as civil defense measures designed to evacuate cities in the event of nuclear attack. Nobody would be concerned about enjoying the landscape while rushing pell-mell away from ground zero.[83]

By the late 1950s, however, a loose coalition of interests had begun to protest the sweeping redevelopment proposals and "bigger, faster, better" mentality that dominated highway engineering and urban planning. Jane Jacobs's eloquent arguments against the wholesale destruction of neighborhoods caused by large-scale urban-renewal schemes help shape a new generation of planners who sought to mend the existing urban fabric rather than impose a new one cut from whole cloth.[84] Books like Peter Blake's God's Own Junkyard (1964) and Christopher Tunnard and Boris Pushkarev's Man-Made America: Chaos or Control? (1963) castigated highway engineers and urban planners for turning neighborhoods and scenic areas into vast spaghetti bowls of concrete commuter arteries.[85] Architects and landscape architects again attempted to advise highway engineers on the aesthetics of freeway construction. Tunnard's book contained an extensive discussion of ways to improve the "internal harmony" and "external harmony" of the freeway. A group of architects and planners produced The View from the Road (1964), a quirky volume employing experimental graphics in an effort to understand and improve the visual experience of modern highways.[86] The federal government even joined in this re-examination of highway policy and design. The Freeway in the City (1968), a report to the Secretary of the Department of Transportation, presented the views of a team of architects, landscape architects, planners, and engineers brought together to try to find a solution to what even the highway establishment itself admitted was "the growing image of the

---

[82] Clay, "The Tiger Is Through The Gate," 79.

[83] In 1959, traffic expert Charles Glover characterized the new urban expressways as "avenues of survival" that should be designed to quickly and effeciently evacuate the car-owning population of "threatened or stricken cities" (Glover, "The Challenge of the New Highway Program," 68).

[84] Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities (New York: Random House, 1961).

[85] Peter Blake, God's Own Junkyard (New York: Holdt, Rhinehardt, Winston, 1964).

[86] Donald Appleyard, Kevin Lynch, and John Myer, The View from the Road (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1964).

freeway as a despoiler."[87] Citizens groups in a number of cities--including Washington--banded together to protest highway construction in their neighborhoods and parks.[88]

Together with the growth of ecological awareness and the institutionalization of broad-based environmental impact studies, these initiatives put a stop to many massive highway development plans. The renewed interest in scenic beautification that began to express itself in the 1960s resulted in the more artistically designed layouts apparent in some interstate highways built in the 1970s, including such scenic routes as the northern sections of I-89, I-91, and I-93 in New Hampshire and Vermont. Today, the renovation of aging parkways has become a particularly sensitive issue. Concerns for safety and legal liability often compete with the desire to maintain the integrity of historically significant designs. In some cases, the National Park Service has made considerable efforts to develop safety precautions that retain parkway character. The most recent National Park Service road construction manual, revised in 1984, urged managers to avoid "blind applications of standards" in favor of treatments responsive to the scenic quality, historical features, and environmental considerations of individual roads. Recent renovations of Skyline Drive, for instance, replaced low, hand-made rock guard walls with higher barriers of reinforced concrete faced with rustic stone veneer that met current safety standards without drastically altering the parkway experience. Citizens's protests and the construction of the Washington Metrorail system saved Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway from threatened redevelopment during the 1960s, but the pressures of constantly increasing commuter traffic continue to threaten the parkway's scenic character and historic integrity.[89]

---

[87] Michael Rapuano and Lawrence Halprin, The Freeway in the City: Principles of Planning and Design, A Report to the Secretary, Department of Transportation (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1968), 10.

[88] See Helen Leavitt, Superhighways Superhoax (New York: Doubleday, 1970), for a detailed but rather polemic contemporary portrayal of the anti-expressway movement.

[89] White House Conference on Natural Beauty, "Beauty for America: Proceedings of the White House Conference on Natural Beauty, May 24-25, 1965 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965); Gary Klinedinst, "Parkway Design," in Parkways: Past, Present, and Future, 33-38.

THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF ROCK CREEK AND POTOMAC PARKWAY

Washington at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

All of the preceding factors came together in Washington D.C. at the turn of the twentieth century to bring about the development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The parkway reflects the combined influences of the City Beautiful movement, the American reverence for nature, the professionalization of landscape architecture, and the growing popularity of parkways as urban and suburban amenities. Despite near-universal agreement that something should be done to transform the lower portions of Rock Creek valley into some sort of attractive parkway or boulevard, however, the exact form and timing of this improvement was by no means agreed upon. From the 1880s until well into the 1920s, landscape architects, engineers, politicians, homeowners, and businessmen carried on extensive--and sometimes vitriolic--debates over just what form the parkway should take, when and where it should be built, and who should pay for it.

The City Beautiful movement had an enormous impact on Washington. It was bad enough that the average American city was ugly and amorphous, but there was no excuse for the haphazard growth that made the nation's capital a chaotic mishmash of monumental buildings and grand mansions, partially developed avenues, conflicting street systems, squalid tenements, polluted stream courses, an industrialized waterfront, and unhealthy tidal swamps. Chicago's 1892 World's Columbian Exposition had demonstrated that American urban designers could produce monumental cities to rival anything European capitals had to offer. Why, then, did the nation's capital lack the grandeur and elegance of its Old World predecessors?

In 1900, the centennial of the government's removal to Washington provided a prime opportunity for critics to call for a major effort to restore the order and dignity envisioned by George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Pierre L'Enfant a century before. Politicians and civic leaders rose to grand oratorical heights advocating the improvement of Washington "in a manner and to the extent commensurate with the dignity and resources of the American Nation."[90] The American Institute of Architects (AIA) held its convention in Washington that year and focused on the issue of improving the city's appearance.[91] After hearing numerous papers advocating specific improvements, the AIA appointed a committee to work with Congress on developing a systematic plan for the development of Washington.

As a result of these consultations, Senator James McMillan of Michigan, chairman of the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia, submitted a resolution on March 8, 1901, calling for the establishment of an expert commission to develop guidelines for the coordinated improvement of the park system of the District of Columbia. The resolution passed easily and the McMillan Commission, as it became known, undertook an extensive study of the task, submitting its recommendations in January 1902. The Senate Committee appointed Daniel Burnham, architect and coordinator of the Chicago Exposition, and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., as initial

---

[90] H. P. Caemmerer, Washington: The National Capital (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932), 73.

[91] Glen Brown, ed., Papers Relating to the Improvement of the City of Washington, District of Columbia (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901).

members of the commission. Burnham and Olmsted invited architect Charles McKim and sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens to join them. Charles Moore, the clerk for the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia, was assigned to assist them. The commission members sailed to Europe, where they examined the parks and architecture of London, Paris, Rome, Vienna, and other capitals before submitting their report.

The McMillan Commission report is one of the classic documents of City Beautiful-era planning. Eloquently written and lavishly illustrated, it called for "the treatment of the city as a work of civic art" through informed, tasteful, and carefully coordinated planning.[92] Criticizing the previous century of ill-conceived, piecemeal development, they observed that "in the absence of a well-considered plan, the solution of these grave problems has either been postponed or else has resulted in compromises which have marred the beauty and dignity of the national capital."[93] The McMillan Commission praised L'Enfant's plan and proposed a complementary arrangement of neoclassical buildings, spaces, and monuments. The commission prepared a comprehensive plan that detailed the location and treatment of public buildings and monuments and guided the development of a unified system of parks and parkways. Acknowledging that the elaborate park system they proposed was not part of the original plan for Washington, the commission maintained that it reflected "the need, not recognized a hundred years ago, for large parks to preserve artificially in our cities passages of rural or sylvan scenery and for various spaces adapted to various forms of recreation."[94] Taken together, the commission maintained, these improvements would enhance the healthfulness of Washington and serve as "a visible expression of the power and taste of the people of the United States."[95]

The McMillan Commission warned that the rapid pace of residential and commercial development called for quick action to secure parkland for the benefit of future generations. They recommended the improvement of existing parks, the creation of parkways linking "spots of exceptional beauty," the conversion of the banks of the Potomac into an attractive recreational area, and the establishment of a continuous ring of parkland connecting the abandoned Civil War forts that encircled the capital. This extensive park system would not only be beautiful and uplifting, it would provide demonstrable public-health benefits. The new parks would replace unhealthy swamps, restore polluted streams, and eliminate the unsightly habitations and marginal populations that tended to materialize on these unwanted lands. A well-developed park system was also seen as a palliative to Washington's oppressive summer heat. Forested parks would provide shade and breezy hilltops. In addition, the cool air that settled in the preserved stream valleys would offer a soothing respite from hot summer temperatures.[96]

---

[92] McMillan Commission Report, 12.

[93] McMillan Commission Report, 7.

[94] McMillan Commission Report, 23.

[95] McMillan Commission Report, 19.

[96] McMillan Commission Report, 75-76. In the days before air-conditioning people were more attuned to subtle variations in local climates. Well into the 1920s, families would drive into Rock Creek Park to escape the heat. Many spent the night in their cars there to take advantage of the cooler valley temperatures. In 1922, the Washington Herald reported that as many as 500 cars could be found in the park on a hot summer's night, most of them containing respectable families seeking relief from the heat. ("Parking in Rock Creek," Washington Herald, 14

While declaring that Washington deserved the "very best" urban park system, commission members made it clear they were practical men, and not merely fanciful dreamers unconcerned with economic issues. They rehearsed the usual arguments for the economic benefits of civic improvements, and claimed that proposed parks would neither interfere with the commercial development of the capital nor remove valuable land from the city's tax rolls. Careful attention had been paid to select for park purposes "only those places which from their natural conditions, whether because of steepness, inaccessibility, or difficulties of drainage, or from their peculiar and exceptional beauty, seemed likely to bring a smaller return to the community if used for the ordinary purposes of private occupancy than if used for parks."[97]

The lower Rock Creek valley seemed to satisfy both of these conditions. At the turn of the century, Rock Creek valley above Q Street was virtually undeveloped, save for a few stately homes along the east bank near Sheridan Circle. The Washington Aqueduct maintained a pumping station and caretaker's house at the bottom of the valley just below the line of Massachusetts Avenue. A rustic road known as "Lovers Lane" followed a small valley along the edge of the Montrose estate down to these facilities. Farther south, across from Oak Hill Cemetery, stood the empty shell of historic Lyons Mill. A steep dirt road descending between Oak Hill and Mount Zion cemeteries provided access to the mill site. Aside from these intrusions, the valley retained its wooded, park-like character from Q Street to the southern boundary of the National Zoo. A scenic bridle path wound its way north from P Street through the heavily forested valley floor, eventually joining up with the bridle path system of Rock Creek Park. Huge beech and oak trees gave the region between Massachusetts Avenue and Connecticut Avenue a particularly handsome appearance.

The McMillan Commission report described the valley above Q Street as being "very attractive," with much the same "sylvan character" of Rock Creek Park itself.[98] Referring to the area between Massachusetts and Connecticut avenues, the Commission of Fine Arts declared, "No words can adequately describe the beauty of this valley in summertime; even in winter there is majesty in its spreading trees." Of the region neighboring Oak Hill Cemetery they wrote, "No noise suggestive of the city reaches this beautiful valley. The low murmur of the water along the moss covered wall and the overhanging shade all contribute to quiet and restful thoughts--it is truly one of the gems of the future parkway."[99]

Below Q Street, however, Rock Creek valley took on a markedly different character. The McMillan Commission declared the lower valley "unsightly to the verge of ugliness" and singled out the stretch from Pennsylvania Avenue to Q Street as particularly "shabby, sordid and disagreeable."[100] Other observers were less charitable. The Washington Board of Trade referred to

---

June 1922; see also "Night Parking Prohibition Rule in Rock Creek Exempts Families," Washington Evening Star, 18 July 1922).

[97] McMillan Commission Report, 77.

[98] McMillan Commission Report, 86.

[99] "Photographs: Rock Creek Parkway, Present Condition," looseleaf notebook, Commission of Fine Arts Library, Washington, D.C., 17-19.

[100] McMillan Commission Report, 11, 86.

the lower valley as "a noisome and repulsive dumping ground."[101] Former District official Richard J. Beall characterized lower Rock Creek as an "open sewer" and recounted an incident in which he had seen young swimmers using the bloated body of a dead horse as a diving platform.[102] Arguing for legislation to improve the valley in 1913, Senator Elihu Root of New York asserted that it was "little less than criminal to go on without doing something like we have provided in this bill in regard to the treatment of lower Rock Creek, cesspool and pesthole that it is."[103]

The lower reaches of Rock Creek were a combination industrial zone and public dumping ground. As was the case with many urban streams, Rock Creek valley between M and Q streets had been regarded as a convenient place to dispose of construction waste, street sweepings, manure, ashes, and general rubbish. Between M and P streets, the formerly open valley was nearly choked with debris. Steep banks of unstable wastes encroached on the edges of the stream. Photographs from this period show Rock Creek as a narrow ditch hemmed in by towering banks of debris. The Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission's report of 1916 presented a vivid description of the environmental degradation occurring in this area of the valley. By 1916, unrestricted dumping had effectively blocked off portions of the lower valley even to pedestrian use. While the upper valley remained attractively undeveloped, the 1916 report declared:

> From L Street to P Street the valley presents a totally different type of physical condition, the natural features having been almost entirely eliminated by the dumping of refuse on the creek banks. The former broad places have been narrowed to precipitous slopes of ashes and other rubbish, the unrestricted deposit of years. Where dumping has ceased the slopes are overgrown with tangles of bush and trees until they present a sordid and undesirable appearance.[104]

The Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission bolstered its case for speedy development of the parkway by noting that the degraded condition of the lower valley had "long militated against the occupancy of the region by any but the lowest type of population."[105] In the vicinity of P Street a number of ramshackle frame houses hugged the banks above the creek. Brick rowhouses, inhabited by blacks and poor whites, crowded along P Street and M Street on both sides of Rock Creek. Exhibiting the race and class bias typical of City Beautiful reformers, the McMillan Commission lumped this "poor class of residences" along with manufacturing concerns as undesirable land uses that the proposed parkway would replace with attractively landscaped improvements.[106]

---

[101] Washington Board of Trade Annual Report, 1917, 52.

[102] Letter, Richard J. Beall to Engineer Commissioners of D. C., 27 February 1905; Minutes of a Hearing Granted Richard J. Beall and General A. C. Hawley in reference to Senate Bill #7169 "Providing for the arching of Rock Creek from L Street to Connecticut Avenue extended," 3 March 1905; both in Correspondence of the Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, 1897-1918, Record Group 42, Entry 241, National Archives.

[103] 49 Congressional Record 4700, quoted in Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park, 53.

[104] Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916, 27.

[105] Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916, 17.

[106] McMillan Commission Report, 140.

Photographs taken prior to demolition show most of these buildings to be inhabited and in relatively good condition. Some of the wood frame houses right above the creek were surrounded by flower and vegetable gardens. One creek-side resident maintained an extensive set of beehives and advertised honey for sale. Compared to the elegant mansions being constructed along Massachusetts Avenue and the northern reaches of the parkway, however, these prosaic accommodations represented an under-utilization of potentially valuable real estate. In addition, the parkway commission invoked the specter of danger to "unaccompanied women and children" as further reason for including this area within the taking lines of the proposed parkway. Acquiring the entire lower valley would improve public safety by eliminating the poorest habitations along the edges of the valley and allowing the authorities to evict the tramps and squatters who made their homes along the valley floor. The McMillan Commission admitted that a parkway through this valley would be difficult to police, but promised that an "open and sunny" landscape would replace the "dense thickets and somber groves" where tramps and other malcontents might hide to molest middle-class parkway users.[107]

If the idea of transforming the heavily polluted middle portion of Rock Creek valley into a scenic parkway required a tremendous leap of faith, picturing the creek mouth and Potomac riverfront as an attractive pleasure drive was nothing short of visionary. South of Pennsylvania Avenue, Rock Creek ran through the heart of an intensively developed industrial zone. Below the Pennsylvania Avenue bridge the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal entered the creek amid a jumble of brick sheds, builders' supply yards, and carriage works. Across from the canal entrance the creek bank was rigidly straightened and held in place with pilings. The towpath for the canal continued along the west bank of the creek, where it passed beneath the iron girder K Street Bridge and past a series of mule sheds before ending at the "mole" on the creek mouth, where huge piles of sand, gravel, and other heavy cargo were deposited. The distinctly un-picturesque facilities of a paving company occupied this site for many years, its owners proving unwilling to relocate even after the construction of the parkway.

The Potomac waterfront was even more industrialized than the lower reaches of Rock Creek. The huge tanks, sheds, coal heaps, smokestacks, and elevated trestle of the Washington Gas Light Company dominated the east side of the creek mouth and the adjacent waterfront. An ammonia works, coal-tar products factory, wharves, assorted small industries, and old houses contributed to the ambience of productive disorder that characterized this region. The industrial character of the Potomac waterfront was so firmly established that none of the early proposals for a parkway along Rock Creek even contemplated carrying the parkway to the river's edge. Various schemes were proposed to bypass the creek mouth area, either by running the parkway east along 27th Street or by carrying it above the industrial zone on an elevated causeway.

---

[107] Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916, 10: McMillan Commission Report, 14. Potential conflicts between middle-class and lower-class users continued to worry official observers as the parkway was being built. In a 1927 article describing the progress of brush clearing along the parkway, the Washington Evening Star noted that, along with beauty and utility

> Another angle is safety. The dense thickets heretofore existing throughout these reservations provided convenient places in which undesirables might linger, to cook a meal, and, if occasion offered, to frighten or molest some traveler.

("Beneficial Bonfires," Washington Evening Star, 22 March 1927).

The McMillan Commission report was by no means the first proposal for transforming lower Rock Creek valley from a municipal embarrassment and public health hazard into a useful and attractive civic amenity. As early as 1867, Major Nathaniel Michler of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had suggested in his report on the development of Rock Creek Park that, "Avenues leading along Rock Creek to the southern limits of the park should be opened." Recognizing the difficulty in securing appropriations for a large public park, however, Michler concentrated on extolling the virtues of the more remote and attractive area north of the present National Zoo. Michler advised that the southern borders of the park "not approach more closely than necessary the city limits, leaving out where possible such sites as would greatly enhance the cost."[108] Resistance to the expenditure of federal funds for a pleasure ground that principally benefitted District residents defeated both the 1867 park initiative and an 1887 proposal that would have extended Rock Creek Park's southern border down to the line of Massachusetts Avenue extended. An even grander plan, presented by Captain Richard L. Hoxie, assistant to the engineer commissioner of the District of Columbia in 1880, advocated building a dam just north of Georgetown to form a four-mile long lake. The proposed reservoir would increase the city's water supply and serve as the basis of an 8,000-acre public park while submerging most of Rock Creek valley. Congress did not rule favorably on this suggestion either. In 1889, a group of Georgetown citizens suggested extending the proposed suburban park as far south as P Street, also to no avail. When a coalition of influential local businessmen and supportive congressmen finally pushed through legislation authorizing the creation of Rock Creek Park in 1890, the bill contained no provision for treatment of the valley below the northern boundary of the National Zoo.[109]

To Fill or Not to Fill?

Conventional design histories tend to emphasize the interplay of prominent designers and prevailing aesthetic theories, as if changes in the built environment proceeded according to an orderly process of intellectual succession. Such change rarely occurs as a purely intellectual exercise unaffected by economic and political issues, however; developments that later seem to be foreordained stages in a seamless teleological progression were often chosen from among a variety of options that were seen to have roughly equal merit at the time. A close examination of turn-of-the-century debates over the basic treatment of the Rock Creek valley reveals that economic concerns and local and national politics were at least as important as abstract aesthetic issues in determining the eventual form of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Well into the twentieth century, the form and function of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway were by no means a foregone conclusion.

By the 1890s Congress, District officials, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Georgetown business interests, and City Beautiful advocates led by the Washington Board of Trade were engaged in a heated debated concerning the proper treatment for the lower Rock Creek valley. All sides agreed that the increasingly polluted stream course was a civic embarrassment, a public health hazard, and a serious detriment to neighboring real estate values and commercial ventures. Two opposing solutions were proffered, one supported primarily by Georgetown businessmen, and the other by

---

[108] Michler, Sen. Doc. No. 21 (1867), 4.

[109] Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916, 7-8; Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park, 1-15.

promoters of naturalistic parks and City Beautiful-style reform. Both sides aggressively lobbied Congress and the District Commissioners to advance their ideas. With both sides claiming their proposals offered the most attractive and advantageous approach to the improvement of Rock Creek valley, political expedience and bottom-line economics, rather than impassioned City Beautiful-style oratory, eventually determined the future of the contested terrain.

The City Beautiful forces felt that the lower valley should be restored to its original condition through extensive regrading to create an attractively landscaped parkway linking Rock Creek Park with West Potomac Park. The Georgetown merchants viewed the polluted valley as a crippling barrier to their efforts to increase traffic and commerce between Georgetown and Washington. They demanded that the entire valley be filled in and converted into city streets and productive real estate, with Rock Creek channeled into a tunnel that would run beneath a broad formal boulevard.[110] Both sides advanced elaborate arguments detailing the civic and financial wisdom of their respective proposals. While hindsight makes the open-valley treatment seem like a foregone conclusion, the closed-valley advocates aggressively pursued their case and almost had their way in the first years of this century. Landscape architects, Congress, and the Corps of Engineers repeatedly considered both measures before finally ruling out the closed-valley treatment after a detailed study in 1908 cast it as exorbitantly expensive and of dubious technical merit.[111]

Opponents of the open-valley plan were not simply avaricious philistines intent on converting potential parkland into profitable real estate. Many Georgetown merchants and property owners were legitimately concerned that their community seemed to be missing out on the rapid growth that Washington and its northwest suburbs were experiencing at the end of the nineteenth century. Georgetown had been in economic decline for decades. It had once been a prosperous shipping point, but the C & O canal and the Georgetown waterfront could no longer compete with the B & O Railroad, the Southwest harbor, and the port of Baltimore. Population growth, commercial activity, and street improvements in Georgetown lagged well behind central Washington and the new suburbs.[112] The Georgetown Citizens' Association and similar groups viewed the closed-valley project as an essential step toward claiming a well-deserved share in the larger city's economic revitalization. The organization maintained that filling in the valley would create an attractive new residential district and would eliminate the physical and perceptual barriers that stymied Georgetown's economic growth. They asserted that the undertaking would eventually pay for itself by stimulating business and adding valuable real estate to the tax rolls, especially if a handsome formal boulevard replaced the polluted valley and adjacent "slums." Such boulevards had effectively raised land values and brought in a "better class" of residents in neglected areas of other cities, so it seemed logical to Georgetown's boosters that elegant townhouses would rapidly replace the tenements and old frame houses that lined the polluted valley.

---

[110] Covering over urban streams was an not unusual practice in expanding American cities. Precedent already existed in Washington, where Tiber Creek was channeled through a conduit and covered over along the line of what is now Constitution Avenue during the period of improvements instigated by Alexander Shepherd in the 1870s.

[111] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, From Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek.

[112] Kathryn Schneider Smith, Port Town To Urban Neighborhood: The Georgetown Waterfront of Washington, D.C. 1880-1920 (Washington, D.C.: Center for Washington Area Studies, George Washington University, 1989), 11-13.

In 1892 Congress responded to pressure from Georgetown interests, as well as to general public health concerns, by authorizing Captain William T. Rossell, engineer commissioner of the District of Columbia, to study the possibility of converting Rock Creek into a sewer from Massachusetts Avenue to the Potomac River and filling in the valley above the conduit.[113] The plan called for the purchase of 4.2 million square feet of land and the construction of a 50' tall arch to contain the stream. Since the C & O Canal used the bottom stretch of Rock Creek to reach the Potomac, its interests had to be provided for by constructing a new canal outlet. Selling lots on the filled land was suggested as a means to reduce the cost of the project, though no one was quite prepared to say how much the land would be worth or when it would be stable enough for building purposes.

Rossell's 1893 report to Congress contained arguments both for and against the conduit project. Rossell initially appeared to favor the pragmatic reasoning of the closed-valley advocates. He noted that filling the valley would have the beneficial effect of "making useful land now so situated so as to be comparatively useless and obliterating the creek as a barrier between Georgetown and Washington." On both aesthetic and economic grounds, the engineer commissioner's sympathy with the general sentiments of the Georgetown forces was reflected in his contention that:

> This improvement, reclaiming a large body of land between Washington and Georgetown and making them one, will increase the revenues of the District of Columbia by the increased taxation and will add to the beauty of the city.[114]

The conduit promoters' hopes of using more persuasive public-health arguments to strengthen their position were dealt a severe blow, however, when Rossell questioned the technical merit and economic wisdom of transforming the creek into a closed sewer. "As a means of sewage disposal it would be wrong in principal and enormously expensive," he declared.[115] Rossell advised that it would be better to let Rock Creek absorb storm run-off and proceed with current plans for the development of a separate system for raw sewage. In the interim, he urged that the C & O Canal Company be required to open the gates of its barge basin at the mouth of Rock Creek every night so that the creek could flush itself naturally, reducing the health hazards posed by stagnant water laden with sewage and street drainage. With the devastating Johnstown flood of 1889 still fresh in the public's mind, Rossell's report created further doubt about the closed-valley plan by suggesting that debris from a major storm might block the proposed conduit, causing a disastrous flood to sweep through low-lying regions of Washington and Georgetown.[116]

---

[113] The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who until the 1920s were responsible for overseeing public lands in the District, was charged with conducting studies on the feasibility of the various proposals and preparing maps of the more extensively developed schemes.

[114] U.S. Congress. Senate. Communication from the Engineer Commissioner, District of Columbia, submitting estimates of the Cost of Converting Rock Creek into a Closed Sewer, in Response to a Resolution of July 22, 1892. Misc. Doc. No. 21, 52nd Cong, 2nd Sess., 1893, 4; its conclusions are discussed in Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, From Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 13.

[115] Rossell, Communication from the Engineer Commissioner, 4.

[116] Rossell, Communication from the Engineer Commissioner, 9.

Rossell's report satisfied neither side. The Georgetown interests regrouped to press for a less expensive version of the conduit-and-fill treatment, while the Washington Board of Trade continued to push for restoration of the open valley.

The Washington Board of Trade was typical of the "enlightened" chamber of commerce-type groups that promoted the City Beautiful movement. Bolstered by the patriotic imperative of promoting the artistic development of the national capital, Washington's Board of Trade tended be even more ardent in their support for civic improvements than most of these organizations, whose lofty rhetoric rivaled the grandiloquence of the neoclassical monuments they championed. The board's self-described mission was to offer:

> undivided support to every movement that has for its purpose the *improvement* of the Nation's Capital--not alone from social, moral, educational, commercial, and religious viewpoints, but from the physical and aesthetic sides, which have for their aim the *further* development and beautification of our natural resources to such a degree of perfection that Washington in time may justly be called the *most beautiful* and *most substantial* Capital of World Capitals.[117]

Given this self-imposed mission, the well-heeled members of the board of trade had little sympathy for what they must have seen as the petty avarice of unpatriotic Georgetown speculators, who selfishly sought to deprive Washington of precious parkland for commercial gain. The policy of the board's Committee on Parks and Reservations was "to develop on broad, artistic, practical lines the park system of the District of Columbia." In particular, its members aimed to ensure that "these parks and reservations be not diverted to any private purpose whatever."[118] In addition to these proudly stated patriotic and aesthetic motivations, many members of the board of trade both lived in and speculated in the rapidly developing northwest suburbs flanking the upper portions of Rock Creek valley, and thus stood to benefit, either recreationally or financially, from their proximity to an attractive parkway built at government expense. By the same token, many of the realtors and bankers who dominated the board of trade and had already invested heavily in lands northwest of Rock Creek, and would therefore have been averse to the government-sponsored creation of significant tracts of new real estate located along a handsome boulevard convenient to downtown Washington.[119]

In 1889 and again in 1899, the Washington Board of Trade submitted proposals to Congress for transforming Rock Creek valley from Massachusetts Avenue to L Street into an informal scenic parkway that would link Rock Creek Park and Potomac Park, while serving as a neighborhood park for nearby residents. The board of trade's plans called for extensive landscaping to restore the valley

---

[117] "Report of the President," Washington Board of Trade Annual Report, 1913, 32.

[118] From Washington Board of Trade, Park Improvement Papers No. 1, 28 March 1901, quoted in G. E. Clarke, "Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway: Revised Estimates and Designs for the Development of the Parkway," 1 July 1929, report in Historic Resources Services Division, National Capital Region, National Park Service, 3.

[119] Constance McLaughlin Green discusses real estate speculation patterns and the composition of the Washington Board of Trade in Washington: Capital City, 1879-1950 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 14-15, 31-35.

to a semblance of its original condition. From L Street, the proposed parkway left the creek and followed 27th Street to West Potomac Park.[120]

City Beautiful advocates finally got action out of Congress in 1900, when $4,000 was appropriated to hire "a landscape architect of conspicuous ability in his profession" to prepare plans for the treatment of the Mall and for "a suitable connection between the Potomac and Zoological Parks."[121] Colonel Theodore A. Bingham, officer in charge of Public Buildings and Grounds, appointed Samuel Parsons, Jr., of New York City, to undertake this task. Parsons, who came from a family of prominent horticulturalists, was an 1862 graduate of Yale University's Sheffield Scientific School. His career paralleled the professionalization of landscape architecture. He began working in his father's nursery after serving in the Sanitary Commission during the Civil War. At that time, the business was still widely known as landscape gardening and was associated primarily with estate and garden design, rather than with the organization of large public spaces. At first, Parsons worked mostly on the design of country estates. In 1880 he began a fifteen-year association with Olmsted's former partner, Calvert Vaux, who brought him to New York City's Parks Department as superintendent of planting. Parsons eventually rose to become the chief landscape architect for Central Park and park commissioner for New York City. He also designed the grounds of numerous private estates and smaller parks, and authored several books on landscape architecture. Parsons was a charter member of the American Society of Landscape Architects, which held its first meeting in his office in 1899.[122]

While Parsons was a prominent landscape architect in his day, his plans for Washington had little measurable impact on subsequent development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Parsons concentrated on the Mall area and outlined the connection between Rock Creek Park and Potomac Park in only the most general terms. His park link was essentially a variation on the Washington Board of Trade's scheme. Parsons called for the acquisition of a substantial amount of land in north Georgetown and shied even farther away from the industrial waterfront, leaving the creek where it curved at O Street and proceeding directly along 23rd Street to the Mall. He thus excluded the problematic region between M and P streets from park treatment, preferring instead to appropriate a broad swath between 22nd and 24th streets to produce a grand formal boulevard. Secretary of War Elihu Root approved this plan, but it received little additional support. In addition to ignoring local desires to find a solution to the problems presented by the lower valley, Parsons' plan was both too vague to provide practical guidelines and, at an estimated cost of around $17 million--due largely to its excessive incursion into upper Georgetown--too expensive for serious consideration. Even Colonel Bingham was apologetic about Parson's report. He admitted that it was ill-conceived and marred by

---

[120] In its 1900 annual report the Washington Board of Trade's Committee on Parks and Reservations stated that, "Rock Creek at present, between Washington and West Washington, is allowed to be a dumping ground, and the stream is polluted by sewage. Parking, terracing, and driveways would, of course, eliminate these unhealthful and unsightly features."

[121] Sundry Civil Service Act of June 6, 1900, Pub. 163, 56th Congress, 31 Stat. 622.

[122] Richard Schermerhorn, Jr., "Samuel Parsons," Landscape Architecture 14 (July 1924): 231-34.

serious topographical inaccuracies, which he attributed to it having been so hastily prepared that the draftsmen had not personally inspected the ground they were delineating.[123]

The McMillan Commission produced the next official attempt to resolve the issue of reclaiming Rock Creek valley. The commission ignored Parsons' effort and outlined the two basic alternatives suggested by the competing local interests. The McMillan report did not contain detailed drawings of the two treatments, however. Concerned more with swaying Congress and the general public to the cause of beautifying the nation's capital than with the precise delineation of proposed improvements, the commission illustrated its report with eye-catching renderings that provided a general idea of the effects the two proposals would create.[124] The drawing of the closed-valley treatment showed a broad, straight boulevard constructed at the same level as the surrounding streets. This boulevard contained a wide central roadway flanked by four rows of trees. These trees shaded pedestrian walkways and the smaller border roads that provided access to the handsome buildings lining the parkway.[125]

The drawing of the open-valley treatment presented a much more expansive landscape, with curving lanes running through a broad valley along the banks of a winding creek. A bridle path paralleled the carriage road on the opposite side of the stream. The banks of the valley were largely open, save for a few artfully placed trees. The text accounted for the optimistically wide appearance of the valley, asserting that the area narrowed by dumping "would be widened by excavation at the restricted points to a semblance of its original form and clothed with turf and trees."[126] Formal boulevards skirted both edges of the valley. These border roads were lined with evenly spaced rows of trees that screened the abutting buildings from view.[127]

The McMillan Commission claimed that either option would produce a parkway that was "agreeable and dignified," but recommended the open-valley treatment "on the grounds of economy, convenience, and beauty."[128] While Georgetown interests cast the steep banks above Rock Creek as obstacles to progress, the McMillan Commission's report declared that the topography of Rock Creek afforded "a very fortunate opportunity that permits seclusion of the parkway in a valley the immediate sides of which can be controlled and can be made to limit the view to a self contained landscape, which may be beautiful even though restricted."[129]

---

[123] House Doc. Doc. 135, 56th Congress, Dec. 6. 1900, quoted in Mackintosh, p. 48. Parsons' plan was reproduced in Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, From Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek and, in more detail, in Samuel Parsons, The Art of Landscape Architecture: Its Development and Its Application to Modern Landscape Gardening (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915); G. E. Clark was also critical of Parsons' report in his "Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, Revised Estimates," 5.

[124] Rendered by leading illustrators Sears Gallagher and Percival Gallagher, these attractive, easily read drawings exemplified the Commissions's desire to present the case for civic improvements in a form that would be intelligible and inspirational to the general public.

[125] McMillan Commission Report, 85 (fig. 12).

[126] McMillan Commission Report, 139.

[127] McMillan Commission Report, 86 (fig. 11).

[128] McMillan Commission Report, 85, 139.

[129] McMillan Commission Report, 86.

Though the McMillan Commission did not object to the basic concept of a handsome boulevard linking Washington and Georgetown as called for in the closed-valley proposal, it expressed grave reservations about the character of the structures that could be expected to appear along the proposed avenue. Along with the board of trade, the McMillan Commission believed that Washington's more fashionable residential districts were destined to develop north and west of the city. Calling attention to the fact that Rock Creek valley and its environs were "very far from agreeable in appearance," the commission expressed little of the Georgetown boosters' optimism that constructing a grand boulevard would rapidly change the socioeconomic character of the neighborhood. The low standing of the surrounding neighborhood meant the parkway was more likely to be lined with "factories, tenement houses, and the like." The commission warned that even four rows of trees combined with the extra widths of border roads and park strips would not be enough to screen such disagreeable features from a surface-level avenue. Since the abutting buildings would be the primary determinants of the boulevard's character, the commission concluded that the closed-valley treatment would not be in the best interests of Washington's image as a capital city. The commission acknowledged that, "A formal urban boulevard is very dignified, impressive, and interesting when it presents an agreeable aspect of city life," but counseled, "when it presents a disagreeable aspect of city life, and remains, as it must, just as intimately a part of that life, it ceases to be satisfactory."[130]

The commission admitted that undesirable developments would also probably occur along the parkway margins if the open-valley treatment were adopted, but argued that placing the main parkway drive at the bottom of the valley and erecting a screen of trees along its edges would provide much better protection from the unsightly surroundings. The report maintained that the open-valley design would thus shield parkway users from "direct and intimate association with an unattractive part of the city." Segregating pleasure traffic on the park drive from ordinary street traffic was one of the primary goals of parkway construction, and could be more easily accomplished with the open-valley treatment. Cross-traffic could be carried across the parkway on attractively designed bridges, as Olmsted had done in Central Park and in portions of Boston's Riverway. The commission's discussion of this feature underscored both the intended recreational nature of the parkway and its pre-automotive roots. The report advised that:

> For the driver of the spirited horse, for the wheelman, even for one strolling afoot along the parkway, the necessity for crossing a husy thoroughfare at every block, together with several electric-car lines, would seriously mar the ease and comfort of a pleasure excursion.[131]

Closed-valley advocates viewed their scheme's contiguous integration with Washington's street system as one of its primary benefits. They criticized the proposed bridge connections as inadequate and inordinately expensive. The McMillan Commission countered that even with the closed-valley treatment, traffic would naturally gravitate toward a few major cross streets, arguing that this traffic could be accommodated more economically by the construction of one or two additional bridges, which, if attractively designed, would add to the enjoyment of park users.[132]

---

[130] McMillan Commission Report, 140.

[131] McMillan Commission Report, 140.

[132] McMillan Commission Report, 141.

The commission was also skeptical of the supposed windfall in real estate profits that closed-valley advocates contended would make up for the significantly greater initial cost of their scheme. Estimates on the relative costs of the two proposals varied widely. The McMillan Commission relied on Rossell's 1893 figures for the closed-valley treatment, which placed the total cost at $4,522,483. Acknowledging the impossibility of accurately forecasting future real estate markets, Rossell's estimates of the amount to be recouped through sale of lots on the newly filled land ranged widely, from $997,600 to $2,992,800. After deducting the cost of providing city streets and services, this provided for a hypothetical net return of somewhere between $870,000 and $2,860,000. Viewed optimistically, this suggested that the closed-valley plan might eventually cost $400,000 less than the estimated $583,000 expense of the open-valley plan. But it might also cost in excess of $2 million more, depending on the vagaries of real estate prices. These figures obviously did little to inspire the McMillan Commission's confidence in the fiscal soundness of the closed-valley argument. The commission also noted that these calculations failed to take into account the interest on the debt needed to acquire the property and enclose the creek, which might easily run into millions of dollars before all the filled land was sold and developed.[133]

The commission acknowledged that the closed-valley plan would eventually provide a substantial source of income to the city in the form of revenues derived from property taxes and commercial developments on the filled-in land. The open-valley plan, in contrast, would inarguably remove a large tract of taxable real estate from the city rolls. The commission noted that this question came up whenever the creation of parks was considered, and that some financial sacrifices were unavoidable in the pursuit of higher civic values. In the case of the proposed parkway, they asserted that the losses would be minimal and the benefits great. Most of Rock Creek valley was unsuitable for residential or commercial purposes, and there was plenty of prime development land remaining in other portions of the city. Potential buyers could easily find suitable real estate elsewhere in the District. Georgetown and west Washington might suffer somewhat, but the net effect on Washington's tax base would be negligible.[134]

As a final criticism of the financial soundness of the closed-valley plan, the commission questioned the wisdom and ethics of allowing the federal government to enter Washington's speculative real estate market in competition with private citizens. They noted that there was no shortage of property for sale in the District, and warned that developing a significant expanse of taxpayer-subsidized land would glut the existing market. Once again, concern for the real estate interests of the Washington Board of Trade cannot be discounted as a possible motivation for this line of argument. The members of the McMillan Commission knew that they could not hope to accomplish their grand schemes without the avid support of the board of trade, and would not have wanted to risk alienating this powerful constituency. Without the promise of offsetting the expense of filling the valley through real estate sales, however, the commission admitted that "the cost of the culvert project becomes so enormous as to be utterly out of the question." In the final analysis, the McMillan Commission declared:

---

[133] McMillan Commission Report, 137-139.

[134] McMillan Commission Report, 142.

> Rock Creek parkway should be treated as an open valley, crossed as often as may be necessary by handsome and substantial bridges, flanked by traffic roads connecting on a level with the adjacent city streets, and including at a lower level near the stream a drive or drives and such paths as may be needed.[135]

As the carefully considered conclusion of the nation's leading city planning experts, the McMillan Commission's decision should theoretically have put an end to the closed-valley scheme once and for all. But the commission was merely an advisory body with no enforcement power, and there were other factors at work. The primary immediate effect of the McMillan Commission's recommendation to adopt the open-valley plan was to provoke the opposition into redoubling its efforts to turn Rock Creek into a closed sewer. From 1904-06 the Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia received a flurry of letters and petitions from citizens' associations and individuals expressing support for various treatments of Rock Creek valley, with the bulk of the petitions running in favor of the closed-valley approach. As pollution of the valley continued unabated, the District engineer's office leaned closer and closer to supporting the well-organized efforts of the closed-valley forces. In some sections of the lower valley, dumping had proceeded to the point that the banks of ashes and other debris almost met in the middle, so that closing over the top of the creek no longer seemed such a radical solution. The construction of a culvert and fill to carry Massachusetts Avenue over the valley in 1901 provided a demonstration of apparent feasibility of closed-valley approach. The open-valley advocates, meanwhile, were making little headway in their attempts to convince Congress to fund yet another District park. Despite the McMillan Commission report's later fame as a seminal City Beautiful document, during the years immediately following its release, it appeared that local transportation and economic issues exerted a stronger influence on Congress and the District commissioners than did the visionary schemes of the commission's high-profile designers.[136]

While the open-valley advocates were in disarray, a number of closed-valley bills came before Congress during the years immediately after the release of the McMillan Commission report. Several of these received the qualified support of the District commissioners. In 1904 the Georgetown Citizens' Association enlisted Representative William S. Cowherd of Missouri and Senator Nathan Scott of West Virginia to submit bills authorizing the tunneling and filling of Rock Creek from a point slightly above Q Street near the site of the old Lyons Mill to Pennsylvania Avenue. This plan preserved the valley above Lyons Mill for potential park treatment and consigned the lower reaches of the creek below Pennsylvania Avenue to industrial and commercial use. The proposed tunnel eliminated the wide bend in the creek at P and Q streets, running straight from the vicinity of Lyons Mill to Pennsylvania Avenue.[137]

---

[135] McMillan Commission Report, 142.

[136] At least this was true as far as the development of lower Rock Creek valley was concerned. The commission's plans for the Mall and Arlington Memorial Bridge met with more success, though they were not entirely unopposed. See John Reps, Monumental Washington: The Planning and Development of the Capital Center (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967) and Richard Longstreth, ed., The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991 (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991).

[137] S. 3883 and H.R. 11047, 58th Congress. According to Mackintosh, the House version called for a slightly shorter tunnel, extending only as far south as the junction of O Street and 25th Street (Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park, 49).

Public interest in the outcome of the closed-valley legislation ran high. The Georgetown Citizens' Association informed the District engineer that they "heartily endorsed" the measure and asserted that the upcoming bill was "the most important in the history of Georgetown." Another petition accompanied by five pages of signatures from Georgetown residents and businessmen (many of whom gave bank names as addresses) stressed that the proposed improvement was "absolutely necessary" to reinvigorate their economically disadvantaged community. A few writers opposed the tunnel project. One asserted that the District had better things to spend its money on than costly parks of any sort, while another, T. W. Tyrer, proposed a compromise scheme of his own. Tyrer suggested that the creek be arched along the existing channel and filled within 20' of the surface streets to provide a sunken boulevard 100 yards wide bordered by pedestrian promenades. According to Tyrer, "This would produce a driveway of the most charming kind, and connect in a suitable manner the two great parks of the city." Tyrer claimed that he had spoken to "hundreds" of people who supported his plan. The District commissioners, however, were not impressed.[138]

Tyrer was not the only private citizen to submit his own design for the development of Rock Creek. In 1905 Richard J. Beall, of 2004 25th St. NW, secured the support of Senator Shelby M. Cullum of Illinois and other influential backers to press for a bill giving him authority to tunnel the creek from L Street to Connecticut Avenue, where he proposed to construct a dam and a water-powered mill. Beall underscored the polluted condition of the creek and asserted that improvement was "demanded in the interests of public health, as well as the rights of all tax payers in old Georgetown and the West End." Beall offered to undertake this project for the bargain price of $775,000, plus a ninety-nine-year lease on water rights for the mill.[139] Neither the engineer commissioners nor the Senate responded favorably to Beall's proposition. District commissioners did, however, agree to support the closed-valley proposal provided it was accompanied by additional legislation to provide funding for the project.[140]

This blatant disregard for the McMillan Commission's recommendations finally roused the open-valley advocates to concerted action. In May 1906 a group of citizens who identified themselves as residents of both Georgetown and Washington petitioned the engineer commissioner to reconsider his support for the closed-valley plan. They raised a number of objections, including the lack of adequate park facilities in west Washington. They asserted that the open-valley plan would create an attractive park that would "add to the healthfulness of the community by furnishing a channel for the circulation of air, prevent the spread of disease, and act as a safety zone in case of conflagration beginning on either side." The petition echoed the McMillan Commission's claim that such a park would immediately improve neighboring property values, while the unstable fill created by the closed-valley scheme would not be suitable for substantial construction for many years. In the meantime, they warned, this land would undoubtedly fill up with "speculative buildings of an inferior character,

---

[138] These and similar petitions date from February and March 1904 and can be found in "Correspondence of the Office of the engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, 1897-1918," Entry 241, Record Group 42, National Archives.

[139] Letter, Richard J. Beall to Engineer Commissioners of D.C., 27 February 1905; Minutes of a Hearing Granted Richard J. Beall and Gen. A. C. Hawley in reference to Senate Bill #7169 "Providing for the arching of Rock Creek from L Street to Connecticut Avenue extended," 3 March 1905; both in Correspondence of the Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, 1897-1918, Record Group 42, Entry 241, National Archives. Senator Cullum's bill on behalf of Beall was S. 7169, 58th Congress.

[140] Letter, District Commissioners to C. D. Miller, Secretary of Georgetown Citizens Association, 8 February 1905, Correspondence of the Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, 1897-1918, Record Group 42, Entry 241, National Archives.

decreasing the value of the surrounding property, and increasing the danger from fire." In closing, they argued that tunneling the creek would contradict the carefully considered recommendations provided by the "acknowledged experts" of the McMillan Commission, eliminating an essential component of the commission's comprehensive plan for the city of Washington.[141]

In his reply to this petition, Engineer Commissioner Colonel Clarence S. Ridley reiterated his support for the tunnel project. Ridley claimed that he wasn't opposed to the open-valley treatment in principle, but that current circumstances appeared to make the closed-valley option the most realistic solution to the steadily worsening conditions along Rock Creek. Ridley contended that continued dumping along the banks of the creek, along with the construction of the Massachusetts Avenue causeway, rendered the open-valley plan obsolete. Ridley also asserted that the closed-valley plan offered the best solution for uniting Georgetown and Washington, which he implied was a more pressing issue than the creation of additional parkland. He also questioned the political sagacity of the park promoters, advising them that the functional appeal of the tunnel treatment was more politically expedient than the more abstract benefits ascribed to the open-valley plan. Ridley selectively quoted the McMillan Commission to legitimize his position. He countered the park advocates' invocation of the prestigious report by noting that tunneling the creek was "one of the projects suggested by the Senate Park Commission." Ridley conveniently declined to note that the commission had ruled against the closed-valley treatment.[142]

The D.C. Board of Commissioners used Ridley's arguments to justify its qualified support for yet another closed-valley bill in May 1906. This proposal was much the same as earlier ones, calling for a tunnel from Q Street to Pennsylvania Avenue and the extension of 23rd, 24th, and 25th streets northward across the filled-in valley.[143] The commissioners expressed general support for this proposal, claiming that subsequent developments mitigated against the open-valley treatment favored by the McMillan Commission. The commissioners wavered, however, by expressing doubts about the vague wording of the proposed legislation. Instead of recommending immediate approval of the bill, they called for an appropriation of $5,000 to produce an exacting survey of existing conditions, to be accompanied by detailed plans and estimates for the competing proposals. Hampered by the commissioner's lukewarm endorsement, the tunnel bill failed once again.[144]

There was no immediate action on the D.C. Commissioner's recommendations for a detailed survey, but Congress allocated $4,000 in the District Appropriation Act for 1908 to fund a

---

[141] Letter, Judge A. B. Hagner to Engineer Commissioner of D.C., Correspondence of the Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, 1897-1918, Record Group 42, Entry 241, National Archives.

This petition was professional printed on expensive paper and contained eloquently worded arguments presented in the form of a legal brief. The Georgetown proposals were generally hand-typed, somewhat messy, stylistically crude presentations. While it is perhaps impossible to make generalizations based on such scant evidence, this comparison may reflect differences in class, education, and professional status between the advocates of the two treatments.

[142] Letter, Ridley to Judge A. B. Hagner, 27 May 1906, Correspondence of the Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, 1897-1918, Record Group 42, Entry 241, National Archives.

[143] S. 5053, 59th Congress, 1st Session.

[144] Letter, President of the Board of Commissioners of D.C. to J. H. Gallagher, Chairman of Senate Committee on D.C., 18 May 1906, Correspondence of the Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, 1897-1918, RG 42, Entry 241, National Archives.

comprehensive study of several alternative proposals for the development of Rock Creek from Massachusetts Avenue to the mouth of the creek. Major Jay J. Morrow, the new Engineer Commissioner of D.C., and his assistant Captain E. M. Markham, prepared an exhaustive report addressing four different schemes. Their report, submitted in spring 1908, was illustrated with photographs depicting the degraded condition of the lower valley and accompanied by maps and schematic drawings of the various proposals. Ironically, this study sounded the death knell of the closed-valley plan by outlining its staggering costs and questioning the technical feasibility of this supposedly cheaper and more pragmatic solution, while presenting detailed arguments for the financial and aesthetic merits of the open-valley plan. Morrow and Markham urged that, whatever treatment was decided upon:

> the improvement of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to L street, [should] be executed as soon as possible, as the existing conditions are unsightly, insanitary, retard the proper development of the abutting sections, and are a reflection upon the entire city of Washington.[145]

Three of these schemes included some form of tunnel, while the fourth called for rehabilitating the entire creek as an open valley. The area above Massachusetts Avenue was cast as an open park in all cases. The general treatment for this section included a roadway designated "Waterside Drive," which passed underneath the Massachusetts Avenue embankment and loosely followed Rock Creek as far north as the zoo boundary. An access road crossed to the west side of the creek and then split in two below the Connecticut Avenue bridge, with one route ascending to join Cathedral Avenue and the other sticking close to the creek before crossing into the zoo. Below L Street, all the plans provided for an elevated boulevard to carry the parkway above the industrialized waterfront to Potomac Park, as suggested in the McMillan Commission report. The first closed-valley option called for a conduit-and-fill treatment from L Street to Massachusetts Avenue, with a 160' wide boulevard located atop the filled valley. The second plan stipulated the same basic treatment, but called for a grander boulevard 400' across. The third alternative proposed an abbreviated tunnel, extending only as far north as O Street, topped also with a 160' wide boulevard. The open-valley treatment called for widening the constricted areas through excavation in order to create room for a series of low- and high-level roads and paths through a restored, natural-looking landscape. The expenditures for the first plan were estimated at $7.35 million, with the suggestion that reselling the filled land might eventually reduce the government's cost to $5.9 million. The wider boulevard of the second plan would cost more initially and result in less saleable land, making it the most expensive treatment at a net cost of around $7.23 million. The short tunnel was a relative bargain at $5.1 million. The open-valley treatment, however, was significantly cheaper than any of the proposed tunnel projects. Morrow and Markham estimated that it would cost the government approximately $4.75 million.[146]

Morrow and Markham ruled wholeheartedly in favor of the open-valley plan. "On the grounds of cost, time of completion, and the character of the results anticipated," Markham wrote, "the open valley treatment is strongly recommended." The report detailed a number of practical

---

[145] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 30.

[146] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 2.

reasons for favoring the open-valley option. Aside from being significantly cheaper, it was safer and simpler than the tunnel propositions, and thus "better from an engineering standpoint." It could also be completed in half the time of the other proposals. Morrow and Markham asserted that it would thus be better for abutting real estate owners and for the image of the city as a whole. The open space it created would provide a health benefit for the surrounding area and serve as a park for an area of the city that lacked adequate park facilities. It would provide a better link between Rock Creek Park and Potomac Park because the main carriage drive would be segregated from surface traffic and unpleasant surroundings.[147] It would also be more picturesque than any of the closed-valley and boulevard alternatives. Morrow and Markham declared:

> The open valley treatment would give a real and beautiful park throughout a great length of the city, with very easy access to many thousands of people . . . and would seem to have, in a park sense, every possible consideration in its favor. It would unquestionably afford the most desirable kind of connection between the Potomac Park and the upper Zoological and Rock Creek parks, which connection in the future development of the park system of Washington is greatly to be desired.[148]

The 1908 report's repeated references to the need for park preservation reversed the temporary trend toward utilitarian arguments for the development of the valley. In contrast to the recommendations of the District commissioners, Morrow and Markham urged that park values be given more weight than other factors in guiding future treatments. They asserted that "A park effect of one kind or another is unquestionably the essence of any possible treatment of Rock Creek between Massachusetts Avenue and L Street," and claimed that "the vast majority of those who in either a public or private capacity have had to do with . . . the project have had the park question more strongly in mind than the mere elimination of the barrier that now exists in Rock Creek Valley between the city of Washington and Georgetown."[149] The present study, they claimed, was an attempt to find the best solution "not only for the obliteration of the unsightly conditions, but also for the making of a park connection between our two main parks." They concluded that, "A parkway between the two parks is almost mandatory."[150]

Like the McMillan Commission, Morrow and Markham questioned the business acumen of those who forecast a profitable return on the filled-land venture. They observed that:

> It is the apparent expectation of those interested in the closed treatment that the business interests of Georgetown would be vastly bettered thereby, and that a good class of residential construction would spread westward from Washington across the present site of the valley and, invading Georgetown, would finally eliminate the squalid settlements below P Street.[151]

---

[147] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 6-7.

[148] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 5.

[149] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 4.

[150] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 22.

[151] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 5.

Morrow and Markham expressed serious doubts about this optimistic scenario. The 1908 report repeated the McMillan Commission's assessment that the unstable character of the underlying fill would delay the construction of substantial buildings for ten or twenty years. In the meantime, cheap speculative buildings would appear along the boulevard, detracting from its appearance and deterring the projected windfall in real estate profits, on which the tunnel advocates depended in order to make their scheme economically competitive with the open-valley proposal. Morrow and Markham predicted that the open-valley plan would exert a stronger positive influence on surrounding property values. They maintained that "A handsome class of residences" would rapidly appear along the border roads flanking the open valley, creating "far more probability of the elimination of the squalid conditions on the Georgetown bank of the stream."[152]

The 1908 report concurred with the McMillan Commission's reservations about involving the federal government in Washington real estate speculation. Morrow and Markham counseled that the practice of condemning private land at the government's standard two-thirds value and then reselling it at a premium was of "very doubtful legal color." Paying full market price for all the land required by the tunnel projects, however, would render the closed-valley schemes exorbitantly expensive. As for the improved-access-to-neglected-Georgetown argument, the 1908 report asserted that a few new bridges would be equally effective and would afford a more economical means of reducing Georgetown's physical isolation. Morrow and Markham argued that the open-valley plan would actually provide better access, because traffic could cross the low-lying park drive without the congestion-prone intersections created by a surface-level boulevard. The report noted that the banks between M and Q streets would have to be extensively excavated to secure a stable and attractively broad valley. Since dumping was still occurring in this region, and property values along the upper valley were rapidly increasing, Morrow and Markham urged rapid action to reduce land acquisition costs and secure the valley from further encroachment. They concluded with an assertion that it was time to put the impracticable closed-valley plans to rest and press on with efforts to secure legislation and funding for the open-valley treatment.[153]

The Parkway Begins to Take Shape

Having ruled in favor of the open-valley plan, Morrow and Markham provided an exhaustive description of the proposed treatment. While numerous minor alterations and a few major changes were made in the following years, the 1908 plans outlined the basic elements of the current parkway landscape.

The basic configuration of the parkway called for a low-lying carriage road winding along the bottom of the valley. A variety of lesser pedestrian ways and bridle paths loosely paralleled the main drive. To enhance the sense of seclusion in the relatively narrow parkway, these paths were to be located "in so far as it was found practical, so that one path will not be seen from another, neither will one road be seen from another, nor will a path be seen from a road."[154] "Carriageway

---

[152] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 5.

[153] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 5-22.

[154] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 26.

entrances"--the automobile was still a novelty in 1908--provided access to the main drive from Massachusetts Avenue, Q Street, N Street, and L Street on the east side of the valley, and from P Street, Q Street, Lovers Lane, and T Street on the west side. The number of proposed access roads was reduced over the years as the Georgetown-access issue faded and the rising popularity of the automobile made frequent entrances both cumbersome and unnecessary.

New bridges spanning Rock Creek valley were proposed for Q Street, N Street, and between R Street on the west side of the valley and S Street on the east. Existing utilitarian truss-bridges at P Street, M Street, and Pennsylvania Avenue were to be replaced with handsome stone-faced structures more in keeping with the dignified tone preferred by the park designers. Simple bridges would carry the park drive itself over Rock Creek where it crossed south of Pennsylvania Avenue, south of P Street, near Lyons Mill, and near the pumping station below Massachusetts Avenue. A short tunnel was proposed to take the park drive through the embankment that carried Massachusetts Avenue across the valley.[155]

Border roads lined with regularly spaced rows of trees flanked the edges of the valley.[156] These roads would carry commercial traffic and provide access to the abutting houses. An important function of the border roads was to ensure that buildings faced toward the parkway, so that parkway users would see the handsome front facades, not the untidy backsides that might be exposed if adjacent buildings faced away from the parkway to surrounding streets. New buildings would only be allowed on the side of the street away from the park. The hypothetical sections that accompanied the 1908 report portrayed handsome townhouses and grand mansions peeking through the trees that bordered the parkway.

Several unrealized features of the 1908 plan bear closer examination. Design elements discarded by later planners provide important insights not only into the aesthetic intentions of earlier designers, but into the changing practical, economic, and political concerns that influenced the evolution of the parkway's final form.

Morrow and Markham's open-valley plan called for the main drive to split in two about 100 yards below Massachusetts Avenue. One drive remained on the east side of the creek, eventually crossing over to the west side below Lyons Mill. Waterside Drive would provide access to this section. This second drive, which was eliminated from later plans, bridged the creek at Lovers Lane and continued south along the west bank, passing through the bottom edge of Oak Hill and Mount Zion cemeteries. A vine-covered concrete retaining wall separated the road and accompanying footpath from the cemeteries. When completed, the report predicted, "this road and path will be

---

[155] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 2-3.

[156] These border roads consisted of a 30' wide main driveway flanked by two sidewalks. The sidewalk on the park side was 10' wide, the one on the building side 7' wide. A strip for trees and grass was provided on the building side of the street between the roadway and the sidewalk. A "rustic concrete or stone parapet" ran between the outer sidewalk and the valley edge, with trees planted outside the railing. Semicircular observation bays bulged out from the pedestrian promenade along particularly scenic areas of the parkway such as the P Street bend (Report Upon Improvement of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 26-27).

among the most attractive ones within the park area." The report assured that no graves would be disturbed by this construction.[157]

The proposed R Street-to-S Street bridge was a different matter. The report admitted that 250 graves would have to be moved in order to build the bridge. Since the span would principally benefit Georgetown residents, Morrow and Markham suggested that it should be omitted if the prospect of disturbing the cemetery offended Georgetown families. Subsequent reports came to the same conclusion, and the bridge was eliminated from parkway plans. The fact that it was even considered reveals the heavy pressure on open-valley advocates to show sensitivity to the Georgetown access issue. The short-lived plan for an N Street Bridge further reflected the open-valley proponents' need to present their proposal as attentive to the needs of Georgetown residents and merchants. In a similar vein, the report noted that the proposed connection between the parkway drive and T Street by way of Lovers Lane would "make an excellent connection between Georgetown and Washington."[158]

Another key element of the 1908 plan that was only partially realized was the elaborate treatment of the bend in the creek between N and P streets. Morrow and Markham had high hopes for this area. They claimed that the section above O Street "could easily be developed into a beautiful informal city park having a maximum width of 600 feet and a minimum width of 400 feet." Their drawings depicted the wide eastward loop of the original creek channel that was straightened soon after the parkway was constructed. The 1908 drawing of this area portrayed it as a wide bowl spanned by an attractive arched bridge. The main carriageway ran along the west side of the creek. An access road descended through the open area east of the stream, crossing Rock Creek on a low masonry bridge. A number of lesser pathways traversed the area, including a bridle path that passed under the access road through a picturesque masonry arch. Semi-circular observation bays extending from the pedestrian walkway at the edge of the valley provided views of the informally landscaped basin. If these recommendations were followed, the report observed, "the portion of the park between N and P streets could be developed as the most beautiful urban park in the world."[159] By the early 1930s, however, when this section was actually constructed, picturesque landscape parks of the sort envisioned by Morrow and Markham were no longer in fashion. This area received only cursory grading and planting, and has long suffered from official neglect.

A monumental viaduct carrying the parkway above the industrialized waterfront from K Street to Potomac Park was an integral component of both the McMillan Commission's recommendations and the 1908 report. This highly urbanized design may strike modern observers accustomed to the existing tree-lined riverfront as alarmingly inappropriate. At the turn of the century, however, it seemed likely that the waterfront would retain its industrial character for the foreseeable future. The McMillan Commission was thus faced with the difficult task of designing a connection between Rock Creek valley and West Potomac Park that would negotiate the commercial waterfront in an attractive and dignified manner. Pointing to the example of European river cities like Paris, Vienna, and Budapest, the commission recommended constructing a broad, granite-paved quay, or landing place,

---

[157] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 24-25.

[158] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 24-25.

[159] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 3, 27.

along the entire riverfront from the mouth of the creek to West Potomac Park. An arched concrete-and-steel viaduct set back 150' from the new shoreline would carry the parkway to its terminus behind the proposed Lincoln Monument. No major construction would be allowed on the water side of the viaduct, but waterfront industries would be permitted to transfer their goods across the quay by means of wagons, tram cars, and belt conveyors passing through the arches. Making virtue of necessity, the McMillan Commission cast the "Potomac Quay" as a welcome addition to the overall design of Washington. The McMillan report asserted that "the activity of the waterfront would really add to the interest of the parkway and give a character possessed by no other in this country." In European cities, they noted, promenades overlooking commercial waterfronts often provided "the most popular and delightful resorts for the people." The report contained several photographs of similarly urbanized European waterfronts to demonstrate the design's cosmopolitan appeal.[160]

Morrow and Markham concurred with the commission's assessment that, properly treated, the commercial waterfront would provide a desirable contrast to the natural scenery of the upper parkway. "The view from the viaduct," they wrote, "will be an interesting one. The river industries will afford much pleasure to the public using the elevated parkway."[161] Such blithe acceptance of the commercial environs of the lower parkway may have been prompted by political and economic conditions that precluded more pristine options, but the inclusion of a few industrial vistas in a primarily natural landscape experience was entirely consistent with the late nineteenth-century conventions of scenic beauty that influenced the early parkway designers. Factories, mills, and industrial cities cloaked in the pictorial conventions of the picturesque and the sublime appeared in both high art and popular illustrations. Prominent artists rendered industrial scenes, and popular scenery books often contained illustrations of industrial sites along with engravings of natural and pastoral landscapes. America was "Nature's Nation," but it was also proud of its technical prowess and industrial vigor. Landscapes combining evidence of these seemingly contradictory national virtues were often particularly prized. The mountain coal town of Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania, for example, was a popular tourist destination and artist's subject.[162]

The 1908 report reflected this appreciation for industrial scenery in its recommendation to retain the historic Lyons Mill above Q Street and in its description of the creek-mouth landscape. After praising the "fine view" of the shipping activities, Morrow and Markham assured that "the view from the viaduct will be a very interesting one, and the park effect will be found more beautiful in this section than the upper section because of the view of the river and the shore and hills of Virginia."[163] This comment demonstrated the parkway designers' concern that the constricted nature of Rock Creek valley afforded minimal opportunities for the longer vistas considered by scenery aesthetes as essential to a well-balanced park experience. The lower Rock Creek valley

---

[160] McMillan Commission Report, 83-84.

[161] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 20.

[162] For more information on the appeal of industrial scenery in the nineteenth century, see John Kasson, Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Virtue in America, 1776-1900 (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1976), and John Sears, Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[163] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 18, 24, 29-30. The report describes the large, box-like Lyons Mill as "a historic landmark of rustic beauty...a treasure in the memory of many of the citizens of Washington who have enjoyed the hospitality of the Lyons family" (18).

contained attractively wooded sections that provided intimate views of nature, but overall, it lacked the diversity of scenery prized by nineteenth-century landscape connoisseurs. According to prevailing theories of landscape interpretation, the busy waterfront, picturesque bridges, proposed open park at P Street bend, the somber monuments of Oak Hill Cemetery, and even the hulking shell of the old Lyons Mill could be considered welcome additions to the parkway because they contributed variety and human interest to the predominantly forested landscape.

While artistic structures and productive industrial scenery exerted symbolic and aesthetic appeal, Morrow and Markham had no intention of retaining the "sordid housing" that encroached on the banks of the proposed parkway. In the countryside, tumbledown shacks could be appreciated as picturesque remnants of a simpler way of life, but their urban counterparts had no place in the modern City Beautiful. The 1908 report included an extensive list of the structures to be removed. The Washington Aqueduct pumping station and caretaker's house would stay, and there was no mention of eliminating the twelve "expensive houses" fronting Massachusetts Avenue, but the modest habitations along the sides of the creek between Q and M streets were slated for removal. This included a number of small houses and one large brick house on Q Street between North Street and the creek, thirty-eight small houses on the south side of P Street, several more below P Street on the old Paper Mill road, and about twenty houses above the creek between P Street and M Street. A few houses and apartment buildings would also have to be demolished on the east side of Rock Creek around O and M streets[164]

Several commercial structures also occupied land within the proposed taking lines of the parkway. The Washington Railway and Electric Company maintained an extensive facility on the west side of Rock Creek north of P Street, which they were fortuitously planning to abandon for a more convenient location. On the east side of the creek at P Street stood a large building that had served as a riding academy, market, and warehouse. This was currently occupied by an automobile garage and destined for demolition under the open-valley plan. A number of the transportation and warehouse facilities clustered around Rock Creek at Pennsylvania Avenue and M Streets faced similar fates. These included the Columbia Transfer and Storage Company, the extensive Lawton Carriage Factory, and several small garages and gas stations. In order to make room for the viaduct and quay treatment below L Street, about twenty-five frame structures occupied primarily by small businesses were also slated for demolition. The Washington Gas and Light Company was asked to rearrange some of its shipping and storage facilities. The report stressed that the park planners were nevertheless sympathetic with the needs of local businessmen, noting that the viaduct had been carefully located "so as to interfere as little as possible with the maintenance and operation of existing plants." The proposed viaduct did, in fact, respect the needs of the larger waterfront operations. It skirted the Washington Gas works and passed above the C & O Canal, thus avoiding the legal conflicts that plagued the surface-level drive chosen by later parkway designers.[165]

---

[164] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 18-19.

[165] Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, From Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek, 29.

Legislation

While the 1908 report finally ended the stalemate between open- and closed-valley advocates, and produced the first drawings of the parkway's existing topography and proposed development, it didn't immediately appear to bring the parkway any closer to becoming a physical reality. The Washington Board of Trade continued to routinely voice its support for the parkway project in its annual reports, and the Commission of Fine Arts added its approval after it was formed in 1910, but no significant new parkway legislation was introduced until 1911. In that year, Senator Peabody Wetmore of Rhode Island submitted a bill for a parkway linking Rock Creek Park to Potomac Park along Rock Creek valley. The bill advocated the open-valley approach and called for relocation of the U.S. Botanic Garden from the west side of the Capitol building to the proposed parkway. He asked for a $2.3 million appropriation to accomplish this task, and recommended that a commission consisting of the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of War, and the Secretary of Agriculture oversee the project. In public discussions of the bill, Wetmore asserted that many influential Washingtonians, including the president, supported the bill.[166]

The Columbia Heights Citizens' Association and even the Georgetown Citizens' Commission wrote the District Commissioners to express their approval of the new parkway bill.[167] Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., the landscape architect member of the Commission of Fine Arts, conducted a "hasty reconnaissance" of Rock Creek in May 1911 and prepared a report for Senator Wetmore expressing the commission's favorable opinion of the proposal. Olmsted issued several minor criticisms of the 1908 map that accompanied the proposed legislation. He suggested alterations in the taking lines around Calvert Street and Connecticut Avenue to exclude a new apartment building and other expensive real estate. Olmsted claimed these properties would drive up the price of the project with little increase in park values. He also advocated acquiring the steep bank on the west side of the Rock Creek between the Calvert Street and Connecticut Avenue bridges to prevent further construction at this highly visible spot. Olmsted recommended that a more detailed map be produced for further study, and that the proposed Botanic Garden be dropped from the plan. He argued that the valley wasn't topographically suited for this facility. More importantly, he believed the parkway should be designed as a natural landscape without such utilitarian intrusions. A botanical garden, he warned, "would offer constant temptation to introduce greenhouses, working yards, experimental garden plots, and other conspicuously artificial features which would radically impair the character of the whole valley landscape." If the Botanic Garden absolutely had to be included in order to secure passage of the bill, Olmsted suggested that it be located in the wide area below the Calvert and Connecticut bridges.[168]

---

[166] S. 2366, 62nd Congress, 1st Session. Wetmore submitted a similar bill (S. 10851, 61st Congress) at the end of the previous session, acknowledging that it was too late to hope for favorable action on it, but using the opportunity to call attention to the project in preparation for a more concerted effort in the next session, ("Will Push to Buy Land Along Rock Creek," Washington Evening Star, 19 February 1911).

[167] Letter, W. B. Todd, Secretary, Columbia Heights Citizens Association to Office of the Engineer Commissioner; Letter, Georgetown Citizens Commission to Office of the Engineer Commissioner; "Correspondence of the Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, 1897-1918," Entry 241, Record Group 42, National Archives.

[168] Frederick Law Olmsted, "Report for Senator Wetmore on the Rock Creek Matter," 17 March 1911, Rock Creek Park Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives.

The Senate passed Wetmore's bill in August 1911, but the House took no action on it. The Senate then inserted the bill's provisions in the February 1913 omnibus public-building bill. Again the House refused to go along. The House had habitually lagged behind the Senate in approving legislation for other District improvements, including Rock Creek Park. The Senate was generally more responsive to City Beautiful arguments for the beautification of Washington, while the House tended to be critical of expenditures that appeared to subsidize District residents while providing minimal benefits for their constituents back home. The reluctance to fund District improvements stemmed in part from the heightened sensitivity to constituent criticism created by the shorter two-year congressional term. Senators also had more incentive to approve park improvement projects because they tended to live in the Washington area for longer periods, and frequently owned property in town, and thus often had a financial interest in seeing real estate prices rise as much as possible. Some House members apparently did not even take the trouble to distinguish between the present bill and its closed-valley predecessors. When Wetmore's bill came up for discussion, Representative Thetus W. Sims of Tennessee, a perennial opponent of District appropriations, complained, "That old crooked black snake proposition that has been before the House so often and always fails on its own merits was sneaked in here."[169]

By the end of the session, however, the House and Senate hammered out a compromise. Objecting more to the expense of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway proposal than to its substance, the House finally agreed to support the measure provided the Botanic Garden provision was eliminated and the funding request cut substantially. On March 14, 1913, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway received congressional authorization in Section 22 of the Public Buildings Act. Stressing practical necessities over aesthetic concerns, the legislation stated:

> That for the purpose of preventing pollution and obstructions of Rock Creek and of connecting Potomac Park with the Zoological Park and Rock Creek Park, a commission, to be composed of the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of War, and the Secretary of Agriculture, is hereby authorized and directed to acquire, by purchase, condemnation or otherwise, such land and premises as are not now the property of the United States in the District of Columbia shown on the map on file in the Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, dated May 17, 1911 and lying on both sides of Rock Creek, including such portion of the creek as may be in private ownership, between the Zoological Garden and Potomac Park; and the sum of $1.3 million is hereby authorized to be expended toward the requirement of such land.[170]

---

[169] 49 Congressional Record 4247, quoted in Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park, 53. The legislative summary in this paragraph relies on Mackintosh, 53-54. Green, Washington: Capital City, 1879-1950, 178, characterized Sims as a long-time member of the House Committee on the District of Columbia who was a staunch opponent of expenditures for improvements in the District of Columbia.

[170] P.L. 62-432, 37 Stat. 885. (Dates and sums written out in full in original).

Acquisition

The 1913 legislation provided authorization for the creation of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and appointed a Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission (RC&PPC) to oversee its development, but it failed to appropriate any money for the task. The parkway existed on paper only, and it didn't take long for its caretakers to realize that even the paper parkway was fraught with problems. Boundary disputes and difficulties with funding and land acquisition would delay the parkway's completion for more than two decades.

In order to represent the agencies involved in the parkway's development, the initial RC&PPC consisted of Secretary of the Treasury W. G. McAdoo, Secretary of War *ad interim* H. L. Scott, and Secretary of Agriculture D. F. Houston. In actual practice, the parkway--like other parks in the District--became the responsibility of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. Colonel William W. Harts of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the officer in charge of Public Buildings and Grounds, served as the commission's first executive officer. The D.C. Board of Commissioners also took an interest in the project. While it held no jurisdiction over the land-acquisition process, it reviewed the initial survey and forwarded a number of suggestions to the RC&PPC.

Most of the D.C. Commissioners' complaints concerned real estate matters and referred to minor changes in street plans made since the drawing of the authorized map. The commissioners recommended altering the taking lines to reflect these new boundaries. Another suggestion was to include the ravine along Woodley Road, which they recommended as a park entrance from Connecticut Avenue. They also urged that provision be made to purchase land to connect the southern terminus of the parkway with Potomac Park, since the boundary on the original map stopped short at the corner of 27th and G streets. They identified the proposed taking of the C & O Canal property as a difficult problem in need of further investigation. The commissioners sternly criticized the proposed parkway entrance through Oak Hill Cemetery from R and 28th streets, which had replaced the bridge previously proposed for that location. The D.C. Commissioners labeled this feature a "desecration." They pointed out that it would disturb "the graves of deceased members of prominent District families" and complained that the proposed route would cross the final resting places of men "of national reputation." In closing, the D.C. Commissioners advised quick action to prevent continued dumping on private property within the boundaries of the proposed parkway, noting that "many thousand loads of dirt and refuse have been dumped there since the approval of the act."[171]

---

[171] Letter, O. P. Newman, President, Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia, to Secretary of the Treasury William G. McAdoo, Chairman of the Commission to Acquire Land in Valley of Rock Creek, Between Zoological and Potomac Parks, Washington, D.C., 10 November 1913; reprinted in Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916, 20-22.

Most of these suggestions were lifted almost verbatim from a letter from the District Surveyor to the Assistant Engineer Commissioner dated 15 October 1913. The District Surveyor, who had been charged with producing a more accurate map of Rock Creek, informed the Assistant Engineer that this survey took his crew over five months to complete and "was one of the most difficult undertaken by the office in many years." Since Rock Creek valley contained much rugged terrain and formed a "ragged edge" between Georgetown and Washington, survey records were apparently incomplete and full of errors. The surveyor also suggested that a more detailed study was needed, which the commissioners recommended. Letter M. C. H., Surveyor, D. C., to Capt. Mark Brooke, Assistant Engineer Commissioner, D.C., 25 October 1913; "Correspondence of the Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, 1897-1918," Entry 241, Record Group 42, National Archives.

At McAdoo's request, Colonel Harts submitted these recommendations, along with an accompanying map, to the Commission of Fine Arts for its opinion. The Commission of Fine Arts concurred with the D.C. Commissioners' advice and presented some additional suggestions of its own. These remarks also concerned perceived problems with the taking lines of the initial map, which arbitrarily cut across existing streets and property lines. The Commission of Fine Arts recommended that more accurate and detailed plans be drawn up, and offered to advise whoever undertook this task. They also strongly urged that the parkway be extended to meet the western boundary of Potomac Park. [172]

McAdoo combined these suggestions in a letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives dated May 23, 1914. This letter accompanied a proposed resolution granting the RC&PPC authority to make minor changes in the boundaries provided for in the original parkway act. It also requested an appropriation of $75,000 to enable the commission to begin acquiring land. McAdoo stated that the earlier map had been drawn at too small a scale and with inadequate consideration of actual conditions. By cutting diagonally across many lots, it forced the government to acquire more properties than necessary. Granting the RC&PPC discretion to alter the taking lines would enable the government to save a considerable sum of money, he claimed, and would also result in a more useful and attractive parkway. McAdoo again raised the likelihood of difficulties in acquiring essential land near the creek mouth used by the C & O Canal and the Washington Gas Light Company. He suggested that some form of mutually agreeable land swap would be more economical than the costly and time-consuming condemnation proceedings called for in the original legislation.[173]

Intent on making a show of concern about past insider land-trading abuses by members of various commissions and committees, Congress refused to grant the RC&PPC discretionary power over boundary changes. It also turned down the request for substantial acquisition funds. Opponents of expenditures on District improvements may have technically lost the battle over Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, but by keeping tight control of budgetary allowances for park acquisition and construction, they managed to delay the project at every turn.[174] Congress's response to McAdoo's request was to defer action pending the completion of a more detailed study of the matter, for which it allocated $5,000. Undertaken by Colonel Harts and his staff, this study resulted in more exact plans of the proposed parkway and the Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916.[175]

---

[172] Letter, Daniel C. French, Chairman, Commission of Fine Arts to Secretary of the Treasury William G. McAdoo, Chairman of the Commission to Acquire Land in Valley of Rock Creek, Between Zoological and Potomac Parks, Washington, D.C., 24 November 1913; reprinted in Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916, 22-24.

[173] Letter, W. G. McAdoo to Speaker of the House of Representatives, 23 May 1914; reprinted in Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 24-26.

[174] According to Green, Congress at this time was trying to demonstrate its fiscal responsibility by curtailing past abuses in Washington real estate speculation and forcing District taxpayers to pay a larger share of the cost for parks and other improvements (Green, Washington: Capital City, 177-182).

[175] Sundry civil bill approved 3 March 1915, P.L. 63-263 ; reprinted in Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916, 26-27.

Harts's report reiterated the virtues of the proposed parkway, reminding recalcitrant members of Congress that:

> It is seldom that a large city has an opportunity for so effectively cleaning up unsightly and insanitary conditions as those appearing in the lower Rock Creek Valley, the result of which will make it possible to connect two such large public areas as Potomac and Rock Creek Parks.[176]

Harts praised the scenic attractions of the two existing parks, then recounted the unsavory character of the intervening valley, portraying the proposed parkway as essential to the improvement of the health, safety, and civic prestige of Washington. Harts characterized Rock Creek Park as a "varying landscape of delightful woodland stretches and interesting rocky gorges." West Potomac Park, where construction of the Lincoln Memorial was already underway, was "fast developing into one of the show places of the Nation." The scenic beauty of the intervening valley, however, "had long since disappeared under great dumps of ashes and city refuse whose steep slopes descend precipitously to the stream's edge." Photographs of the degraded lower valley vividly illustrated Harts's remarks. Harts's point was clear: here were two of the finest public parks in the world, and only Congress's persistent miserliness prevented them from being connected to form a united park system worthy of the nation's capital. Present conditions represented a menace to the residents of Washington, an obstacle to economic development, and an embarrassment to the people of the United States.[177]

With the closed-valley plan soundly defeated, the Georgetown-access issue no longer preoccupied Harts and other parkway advocates. In addition to stressing the need to reclaim the polluted valley, Harts highlighted the "park-link" function of the proposed parkway.[178] He emphasized that there was no connection between the two major elements of Washington's park system other than congested city streets. Equestrians and pedestrians could enjoy the attractive valley above Massachusetts Avenue, but the lower valley was still unsafe and largely inaccessible, even on foot. Pressing forward with the construction of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway would remedy this situation. When added to the existing road systems of Rock Creek and Potomac Parks, moreover, the parkway would provide the middle link in a continuous pleasure drive of fourteen-and-a-half miles. The 1916 report marked the beginning of a shift in emphasis from general park improvements aimed at a variety of means of enjoyment including pedestrian walkways, bridle paths, and carriageways, to the vision of a lengthy and dominating "parkway drive." This transformation reflected the rising popularity of automobiles and the resultant transformation of tbe parkway idea.

By 1916 motor parkways--and the Bronx River Parkway in particular--were on people's minds. The Bronx River Parkway had long been a regular topic in the popular press. As Harts was preparing his report, the rehabilitation of the Bronx River Valley was well underway and construction

---

[176] Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916, 10.

[177] Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916, 10.

[178] With the completion of the Lincoln Memorial and work going forward on other aspects of the McMillan Commission's plans for the south end of the Mall, East and West Potomac Parks were rising in beauty and stature. This may have contributed to the increasing references to "the parkway linking Rock Creek and Potomac Parks" that began to supplant earlier calls for the more general "improvement of Rock Creek Valley."

of the roadway had just begun. Curiously, Harts made no mention of the Bronx River Parkway, even though the project's widely touted achievements would seem to have presented a compelling argument for the appropriations Harts sought. When pressed for examples of similar projects, he referred to the Olmsted firm's work in Boston. "There are very few cases in this country which can be cited as parallel to the possibilities of this parkway," Harts wrote. "Old Muddy River, separating Boston from Brookline . . . [Massachusetts], might, in a lesser degree, be considered one." The scale of the Boston project was much smaller, and the landscape less severe, but he claimed there was a strong enough relationship to justify the comparison.[179]

There were numerous similarities between the two projects, so Harts's emphasis on the Muddy River project can be understood as more than a transparent attempt to curry favor with the Olmsted-influenced Commission of Fine Arts. Both Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and the Muddy River redevelopment were high-profile City Beautiful-era projects promoted by civic leaders and influential landscape architects. Both were designed to take embarrassingly polluted watercourses posing unsightly physical barriers between neighboring urban districts and transform them into parklands that added to surrounding real estate values and to the cities' overall images. Both projects required extensive excavation, grading, and planting to transform befouled areas into pleasing "natural" landscapes. Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and Boston's Riverway were both conceived as components of larger park systems, designed not only as attractive natural landscapes themselves, but as pleasurable links between formal urban spaces and informal suburban landscape parks. The initial conceptions for Olmsted's grand Promenade and the McMillan Commission's vision of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway both encompassed the transition from formal to informal environments within the landscapes of the individual parkways. Olmsted's Promenade extended from the formality of Commonwealth Avenue to the informal spaces of Franklin Park, while Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway progressed from the proposed neoclassical grandeur of the Mall and the Potomac riverfront to the picturesque confines of Rock Creek Park. In terms of general landscape treatment, however, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway's emphasis on forward rather than lateral views represented a step farther down the road to twentieth-century motor parkway design. The later parkway's designers also painted in broader strokes, forsaking the subtleties of the Riverway's traditional picturesque views in favor of a more general sylvan quality that could be appreciated at higher rates of speed.

Harts knew the parkway's potential supporters weren't interested in landscape aesthetics alone. He closed his appeal by reminding Congress that:

> One quite noticeable result of the Boston-Brookline project has been the improvement in class of buildings since erected on its borders, a result that will surely be reflected in the case of Rock Creek Parkway. This is not only a valuable aesthetic feature but one which is reflected in increased tax returns.[180]

In addition to tidying up the taking lines, Harts's report recommended several significant changes in the parkway's design. Unlike the 1908 report, this one covered the entire length of Rock Creek from the National Zoo to West Potomac Park. Like his predecessors, Harts considered the

---

[179] Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916, 9.

[180] Report of the Rock Creek ad Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916, 19.

valley above Massachusetts Avenue to be "the handsomest section of the proposed parkway." Unlike the degraded lower sections, the heavily wooded landscape between Massachusetts Avenue and the zoo needed little improvement. According to Harts, this area provided "a very real appearance of the country, for its winding stream overhung with trees and its open glades give a foretaste of the beauties of Rock Creek Park." Harts advocated the construction of an additional access road leading to the west end of Connecticut Avenue, and presciently noted that the connection through the zoo to Rock Creek Park would pose a troublesome design problem.[181]

South of Massachusetts Avenue, Harts retained the 1908 proposal of using Lovers Lane for access to the parkway from upper Georgetown, but made no mention of the earlier plan's additional driveway on the west bank of Rock Creek. While a carriageway or bridle path conceivably could have been routed on the west side of the creek with minimal disturbance to the scenery, the broader roadbed and heavier construction required for automobile traffic would have drastically altered the surrounding landscape. Harts praised the appearance of the valley down to and including Oak Hill Cemetery and recommended no other major changes in this area.[182] The old Lyons Mill building had collapsed in 1913, eliminating the issue of its removal or retention. Harts called for major excavation between P Street and M Street to restore the original contours of the valley. He repeated his predecessors' optimism about the potential for scenic development in the open valley at the P Street bend.[183]

Working in close collaboration with Olmsted, Harts' assistant, landscape architect James G. Langdon, prepared an elaborately detailed map of the revised plan.[184] This attractively rendered

---

[181] Report of the Rock Creek ad Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916, 19-20.

[182] Harts also did not mention the earlier R-to-S street bridge scheme. He even argued for elimination of the elderly M Street Bridge, though he suggested that a new bridge might eventually be warranted at N Street. Harts's lack of concern for the previously contentious issue of Georgetown access suggests the waning influence of those interests that had ardently supported the closed-valley treatment.

[183] Report of the Rock Creek ad Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916, 18-20.

[184] The Office of Public Buildings and Grounds hired Langdon in April 1915 as a "Landscape Architectural Designer" with a salary of $3,000 a year. Langdon had been a longtime employee of the Olmsted firm. He was one of the senior Olmsted's chief designers, working on the Riverway project and other elements of the Boston park system. He had recently worked for the Charlottesville and Albermarle Railway, where he designed a residential subdivision. In October 1916, he was assigned as landscape architect and engineer to the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, with an increase in salary to $3,600 a year. He resigned from federal employment in June 1921. (Letter, John Livers, President, Charlottesville and Albermarle Railway Company, to Sherrill, 17 September 1921; Letter, Sherrill to Livers 30 September 1921, Office of the Engineers Document File, 1894-1923, RG 77, National Archives).

Because the design of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway evolved over so many years, it is difficult to apportion credit for the "authorship" of the parkway landscape. While Langdon was certainly a major contributor to the delineation of the parkway plans, other Office of Public Buildings and Grounds landscape architects and engineers worked on the several variations of the design prepared in 1908, 1916, and 1924, as well as on the actual construction drawings containing more precise technical information. Even though the parkway was not an official project of the Olmsted firm, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.'s extensive involvement makes him arguably the most dominant influence on the parkway's design. In addition to his official roles as landscape architecture expert for the McMillan Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts, Olmsted continued to reviewed various stages of the parkway plan after he retired from these positions.

The case for Olmsted as nominal author of the parkway is strengthened by a June 1915 letter from Harts to the Chief Engineers, requesting funds for Langdon to travel to Brookline in order to spend two weeks consulting on plans "now being prepared by Mr. Langdon under the supervision of Mr. Olmsted." According to landscape historian Cynthia Zaitzevsky, Langdon was accustomed to producing finished designs from Olmsted Sr.'s rough sketches and verbal articulations, so it would be natural for him to assume a similar role with Olmsted Jr. in the design of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. While Harts's letter specifically mentions West Potomac Park, the date of the correspondence suggests that he was referring to the larger Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway project on which Langdon was then working. (Letter, Harts to Office of the Chief of Engineers, June 16 1915, Office of the Engineers Document File, 1894-1923, RG 77, National Archives; Cynthia Zaitzevsky,

drawing combined the basic elements of the 1908 open-valley plan with revisions suggested by the District Commissioners and the Commission of Fine Arts.[185] A single tree-lined driveway ran along the Potomac waterfront to G Street, where it curved gently inland, crossing Rock Creek just below Virginia Avenue. At this point, the parkway divided into two separate driveways, one following either side of the creek. Just below Pennsylvania Avenue, the drive on the west bank of the creek divided again. One road continued along the creek bed and the other rose up to connect with Pennsylvania Avenue. This border road proceeded along the edge of the valley as far north as Mount Zion Cemetery, above Q Street. The drive on the east side of Rock Creek ascended to the eastern terminus of the Pennsylvania Avenue Bridge and then formed a border road on the east edge of the valley up to Q Street. The eastern border road reappeared along the line of Waterside Drive and continued to skirt the edge of the valley up to the Calvert Street Bridge. The west border road resumed at the northern edge of Montrose Park and continued to the junction of Connecticut Avenue and Calvert Street.

A key departure of this plan was the proposed elimination of the M Street Bridge and its replacement with a new structure running from N Street on the Washington side to O Street in Georgetown. The 1908 plan's low-level crossing below P Street leading to access roads from 25th and 23rd streets was retained. The main parkway drive continued along the valley bottom on the west side of Rock Creek as far north as the old Lyons Mill Road, cutting through the bottom of Mount Zion Cemetery before crossing back to the east side of the creek just short of Oak Hill Cemetery.[186] The main drive crossed the creek below the ruins of Lyons Mill and continued as a single roadway along the east side of the creek. An access road ran from the Lyons Mill site through the woods to Waterside Drive. The main parkway drive continued on the east side of the creek past the Washington Aqueduct pumping station, where it was joined by an access road from Lovers Lane. The main drive ascended the east bank of the valley at this point in order to pass through the Massachusetts Avenue emhankment by means of a short tunnel. After descending to the valley floor, the parkway crossed back to the west side of Rock Creek a few hundred feet above Massachusetts Avenue and remained on the west side until reaching its terminus at the National Zoo. Another access road wound down the east side of the valley between the Calvert Street and Connecticut Avenue bridges. On the west side, access roads were planned from Rock Creek Drive, Woodland Drive, and from the proposed border road running below what is now the Shoreham Hotel.

The 1916 plan's most radical changes occurred in the lower section of the parkway along the waterfront and the mouth of the creek. Harts discarded the elaborate scheme of elevating the parkway above the waterfront along an extensive viaduct. The engineers' office had prepared detailed

---

Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 152).

[185] A photograph of this map is in the Commission of Fine Arts archives. It is labeled S. Doc. 48, 65-1, Plate III. The Engineers Office may also have made a model to demonstrate the new plan. A letter from Sherrill to Moore dated 25 September 1925, stated that he was glad that the Commission of Fine Arts was "favorably impressed with the excellence of the model and the general treatment of the parkway." If the model still exists, its whereabouts are unknown. Sherrill may have been referring to the widely publicized models of the McMillan Commission's recommendations for the Mall, which portrayed the lower section and waterfront portion of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. (Letter, Sherrill to Moore, 25 September 1925, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives).

[186] Mount Zion was a black congregation, while Oak Hill was one of the most exclusive burial grounds in the District. This may have affected the decisions about taking cemetery property for the parkway.

studies for the viaduct treatment in 1912-13, but the rapid decline of waterfront industries made this expensive configuration increasingly unnecessary. By 1914 both Harts and the Commission of Fine Arts agreed that a surface parkway along the waterfront would be a more attractive and appropriate solution. Harts's other major revision was to separate the C & O Canal outlet from Rock Creek in order to avoid legal conflicts with the canal company. Harts proposed digging an alternate canal bed and constructing two new locks and a redesigned seawall so the canal company would have its own channel, allowing the parkway to continue unobstructed along the banks of Rock Creek. Harts regarded this arrangement as crucial to the future development of the parkway. His proposed alterations did, however, provide enough space on the east side of the creek to slip the parkway drive through this area in the event that the canal company refused to go along with the plan.[187]

As it turned out, Harts' caution was warranted. Parkway advocates had always regarded the presence of C & O Canal Company and the Washington Gas Light Company on either side of the terminus of Rock Creek as a serious impediment to successful park development. The problems posed by the industrialized waterfront had been enough to send Parsons down 23rd Street, stop the 1908 designers short at L Street, and compel the McMillan Commission to propose the grand but impractical viaduct. While the number of minor industries crowding the waterfront had dwindled since the turn of the century, the C & O Canal and Washington Gas Light Company had always presented the major obstacles, and showed no signs of agreeing to willingly vacate the area. As public-service corporations with long-standing rights to the ground they occupied, moreover, there was considerable uncertainty as to whether the power of condemnation granted to the RC&PPC could legally force either one to depart their property if agreeable terms could not be reached.

The Washington Gas Light Company, it turned out, was amenable to a mutually beneficial land swap. The company, which dominated the Potomac waterfront east of Rock Creek, was unwilling to relocate their entire operation, but offered to work out an exchange that would satisfy both parties. The gas company agreed to relinquish its claim to the land desired by the RC&PPC in exchange for rights to block off and use a section of H Street between 27th Street and New York Avenue. The lands released by the gas company were valued at $43,832 more than the lands released by the United States, but the arrangement allowed the gas company to consolidate operations at considerable savings. The only major stipulation was that the H Street segment would revert to the government should the company cease to manufacture gas on the site.[188]

Negotiations with the C & O Canal Company did not proceed as smoothly. The canal company believed its congressional charter would stand up in court against any action the RC&PPC took against it, and thus was not inclined to make a deal unless the company stood to profit from the arrangement. Initially, it appeared that Harts might arrange such a scheme. By late 1915 Harts and the canal company lawyers concocted an arrangement in which the C & O Canal would give up its claim to lands within the proposed taking lines, provided the United States would pay to separate the canal from the creek, construct a satisfactory new canal outlet, and relinquish title to some other contested parcels west of the proposed parkway boundary, including the mole on the west side of the

---

[187] Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916, 11-17; meetings on the viaduct issue between Col. Harts and the Commission of Fine Arts are recorded in "Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.," 4 April 1913, 9-10 May 1913, 21 November 1913, and 23 January 1914, Commission of Fine Arts Archives, Washington, D.C..

[188] Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916, 15-17.

creek mouth. Dispute over the last condition caused negotiations between the two parties to break down in January 1916.[189]

The U.S. Attorney General ruled that, since the C & O Canal charter granted it tenure only as long as it continued to occupy the land for canal purposes, it would be inappropriate to grant them title to the property. The canal company's lawyers argued that the charter gave it perpetual rights to any improvements they created in the process of canal operation, including the contested mole and towpaths. The C & O canal was in financial difficulty and hoped to raise money by leasing or selling the mole and other incidental properties. Harts and the canal company's lawyers politely haggled back and forth for several more months without reaching an agreement. The case then went to court, where it dragged on for years. The canal company's claims became increasingly tenuous after a major flood in May 1924 severely damaged the canal. Operations along the canal all but ceased thereafter, enabling the attorney general to invoke the conditions of the charter and reclaim the disputed land for the United States. The courts finally granted the government title to the land in May 1933.[190]

While the unresolved C & O Canal issue remained a thorn in the side of the RC&PPC for years, Harts had done a remarkable job of reducing the overall cost of the parkway through judiciously revising its boundaries.[191] The new borders called for the purchase of 4,113,818 square feet of land, as opposed to 5,989,581 under the 1913 legislation. The savings in costs were dramatic, with an assessed value of $1,422,693 under the new plan, as opposed to $2,796,209 in the previous survey. The government already owned about 2,881,674 square feet of land within the new taking lines. Altogether, this added up to a total of approximately 162 acres for the proposed parkway.[192]

The RC&PPC submitted Harts's report to Congress on February 17, 1916, calling attention to the need to act quickly in the face of rapidly rising land values along the upper reaches of the parkway. Congress approved the report and appropriated $50,000 in the July 1, 1916, Sundry Civil Service Act to begin the land-acquisition process. For a few months, property owners held out to see whether the government would accept higher prices rather than initiate condemnation proceedings. Offers began to come in by late 1916, however, and the RC&PPC slowly began to accumulate land.

---

[189] Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916, 11-14.

[190] Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916, 28-39; Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park, 58.

[191] In December 1915 the Commission of Fine Arts stated that it was "very much pleased" with Harts's new plans and suggested that he should be "highly complimented on the efficient and painstaking manner with which this important project had been handled and in particular on the diplomatic and effective way his incidental negotiations with the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company and the Washington Light Company have been undertaken." Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 3 December 1915, 4, National Commission of Fine Arts Archives, Washington, D.C..

[192] Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1916, 45-46.

Modest appropriations prolonged the acquisition process, so that by February 16, 1923, the government had only acquired 64.2 acres, or 82 percent of the desired land.[193]

At this point, the RC&PPC decided that it had acquired all the land it could get at reasonable cost, and initiated condemnation proceedings against the holdouts. The C & O Canal case, suspended during World War I, was reactivated. Suits were also brought against the owners of the Cumberland and Analostan Boat Houses, which occupied land claimed by the government by virtue of its right to the Potomac riverfront. None of these cases proceeded rapidly, but the threat of condemnation persuaded other owners to sell at prices the government considered satisfactory. The Washington Electric Railway Company finally parted with its land on the west bank of the creek above P Street, substantially completing the parkway's boundaries in that region. By 1924, the parkway was 92 percent complete. The boathouse owners settled in 1926.[194]

Despite the original legislation's $1.3 million authorization, the Officer in Charge of Public Buildings and Grounds was reduced to pleading with Congress on an annual basis to release the appropriations. The slow pace of the parkway acquisition frustrated the RC&PPC and caught the attention of the press, which printed a number of articles supporting of the RC&PPC's efforts.[195] A December 1924 Evening Star article ridiculed the glacial pace of land acquisition with the headline: "Suit, Virtually Dead of Age, Blocks Rock Creek Project/Wilderness Stands in City Block/While Most of Defendants in Case Have Died or Moved Away." Claiming that the court papers had grown "dusty and yellow with age," the article described the single dilapidated house remaining on the site and reported:

> All else is a wilderness of weeds, dumped trash, broken street curbings (mute evidence of many reckless driving incidents in various parts of the city), bottles and the inevitable rats. Uncle Sam hopes one day to transform this unsightly place into a beautiful parkway. But it can't go ahead until that court case is settled the legal way.[196]

---

[193] G.E. Clark, "Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway: Revised Estimates . . .," 1 July 1929, 17. The RC&PPC's original authorization of $1.3 million was appropriated as follows:

7/1/1916	$50,000	3/4/1921	200,000
7/12/1917	100,000	7/1/1922	100,000
7/1/1918	150,000	7/1/1923	75,000
7/19/1919	250,000	7/1/1924	75,000
7/5/1920	200,000	3/4/1925	100,000

(These figures cited in Letter, U. S. Grant III, to Arthur Capper, Chairman, Committee on the District of Columbia, 17 February 1926; Records of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1915-1933: General Records of the executive and disbursing officer, 1923-1933, Record Group 42, National Archives.)

[194] Clark, "Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, Revised Estimates . . .," 17-18; "More Land Bought for D.C. Parkway," Washington Evening Star, 22 June 1924; "Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, Diagram Showing Progress of Land Acquisition, 1916-1924," Records of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1915-1933: General Records of the executive and disbursing officer, 1923-1933, Record Group 42, National Archives.

[195] Each yearly appropriation battle was reported in stories with headlines like "Sherrill to Seek Boulevard Funds/Will ask Budget Bureau for Completion of Beautiful Parkway," (Washington Herald, 30 October 1924) and "Potomac Parkway Project Delayed/$200,000 asked for Connecting Link with Rock Creek is Disallowed," (Washington Evening Star, 5 December 1924).

[196] "Suit, Virtually Dead of Age, Blocks Rock Creek Project/Wilderness Stands in City Block/While Most of Defendants in Case Have Died or Moved Away," Washington Evening Star, 14 December 1924.

The period from 1924 to 1926 was a trying time for the parkway's overseers. The final installment of the original $1.3 million appropriation was disbursed in 1925, yet several expensive tracts remained outstanding, and little actual work had begun on the parkway aside from some preliminary grading, brush clearing, and bridle-path construction. To add to the RC&PPC's woes, the District park system was undergoing extensive reorganization. A new planning body, the National Capital Park Commission (NCPC), was created in 1924 to oversee District parks and acquire land for their improvement. Harts' successor, Lieutenant Colonel C. O. Sherrill, saw the new agency's broad mission as a threat to rapid completion of the parkway project. During the annual budget crisis in 1924, he asked the RC&PPC to make an extra effort to press the parkway's case before Congress and the president. Sherrill informed the commission of his fear that the NCPC:

> may not be as much impressed with the necessity of completing the purchases of land in the parkway as would the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, and the work of completing these purchases of land may be thus caused to drag out for an indefinite period in the future.[197]

In response, Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon, chairman of the RC&PPC, wrote the director of the Bureau of the Budget reminding him that the parkway's original funds had been exhausted and strongly urging him to provide a $600,000 emergency appropriation to remedy the situation. Mellon warned the budget director not to try to "throw the responsibilities of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission upon the National Capital Park Commission." Mellon cautioned that the Bureau of the Budget had attempted this when the NCPC was formed and Congress had rejected the idea.[198]

The RC&PPC's request for $600,000 to support the final phase of land acquisition touched off a minor uproar in Congress, serving as yet another skirmish in what the Washington Post described as "the perennial question of fiscal relations between the District and Federal governments."[199] The supplementary appropriation measure exploded into a high-profile debate, which opponents of federal spending on the District used to display their purported fiscal conservatism.

The original Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway legislation stipulated that half of the $1.3 million was to come from District of Columbia revenues and half from general congressional funds. In actuality, the bulk of the appropriations since 1921 had come from D.C. funds. In its initial 1926 legislation, the House Committee on D.C. recommended that the federal government pick up the entire tab for the supplementary appropriation. This immediately elicited protest from Congress. House Committee Chairman Zihlman then suggested an even split, but a number of representatives voiced the standard objection that District residents should pay for their own parks. Representative

---

[197] Letter, Lieut. Col. C. O. Sherrill to RC&PPC, 6 December 1924, Records of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1915-1933, Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Parks of the National Capital, Record Group 42, National Archives.

[198] Letter, Andrew Mellon, Secretary of the Treasury, to Brig. Gen. Herbert M. Lord, Director, Bureau of the Budget, 7 January 1925, Records of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1915-1933: General Records of the executive and disbursing officer, 1923-1933, Record Group 42, National Archives.

[199] "Park Plan to Fore in District's Program in House," Washington Post, 11 January 1926.

Thomas L. Blanton of Texas lead the attack, claiming that U.S. taxpayers had already spent $197 million on improvements for the city. Blanton pronounced that if the people of Washington wanted a parkway, they should pay for it by taxing themselves, as would residents of other cities. Representative Hammer of North Carolina pointed out that Washington's status as the national capital made it a special case, and countered that people from all over the country enjoyed its parks. Hammer voiced his support for the measure and castigated his colleagues for their "parsimonious and niggardly policy in regard to park development in the National Capital." Representative Underhill of Massachusetts seconded Hammer's criticism, noting that the NCPC received only $600,000 a year, which he claimed was less than other major American cities spent on park improvements.[200]

The House voted to approve the appropriation, provided funds were allotted entirely from the $9 million lump-sum disbursement provided to the District in 1925. This maneuver angered local civic leaders and City Beautiful advocates, who didn't want the lump-sum practice to become standard procedure. They feared that the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway decision would create a legal precedent for the arrangement, and solicited sympathetic congressmen to restate their case. The Senate had already approved the House's legislation, but Senator Phipps of Colorado succeeded in securing an amendment that once again split the cost of the project between the District and the federal government. When the amended bill went back to the House, Zihlman and Underhill supported it, denouncing Congress's park policy as "penurious." Blanton again lashed out at the "specially favored, petted, pampered, spoiled people in Washington," who were enjoying a "bonanza" at the expense of taxpayers across the country. Blanton read through pages of testimony listing the free services that Washington residents received from federal agencies. Blanton's arguments held sway, and the measure passed both houses with the stipulation that the $600,000 appropriation come entirely from District funds.[201]

The 1926 appropriation did not end the RC&PPC's chronic funding woes. By 1928, Ulysses S. Grant III, who replaced Sherrill as executive officer of the RC&PPC, was experiencing similar frustration at the slow progress of the remaining parkway acquisition. Grant vented his exasperation in a letter to a helpful member of the Committee on Ways and Means. After expressing his gratitude for help in supporting higher appropriations, Grant noted, "It certainly seems desirable that the generation which furnished the money should have use of the parkway."[202] To speed things up, Congress finally agreed in early 1929 to grant the RC&PPC authority to make minor changes in the taking lines without first securing legislative approval.[203] This allowed Grant to eliminate a few

---

[200] "House Committee Approves $600,000 for Park Project," Washington Post, 7 January 1926; "Park Plan to Fore in Districts Program in House," Washington Post, 11 January 1926; Congressional Record-House (1494) in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Project File, Commission of Fine Arts records, Record Group 66, National Archives.

[201] "Park Plan to Fore..."; "House Votes Fund to Finish Parkway," Washington Evening Star, 12 January 1926; "Phipps Proposes U.S. Defray Share of Parkway Expense," Washington Evening Star, 18 March 1926; "House Refuses 50-50 Parkway Project Plan," Washington Post, 21 April 1926; Congressional Record-House 1491-1500, in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Project File, Commission of Fine Arts records, Record Group 66, National Archives; Clark, "Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway: Revised Estimates . . .," 18.

[202] Letter, U. S. Grant III to Rep. Allen Treadway, Committee on Ways and Means, 21 January 1928, Records of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission, 1915-1933: General Records of the executive and disbursing officer, 1923-1933, Record Group 42, National Archives.

[203] Sen. Bill 5339, 70th Congress, 2nd Session.

expensive properties that were no longer deemed necessary. By June 30, 1929, the RC&PPC had acquired all but 4.67 acres of the proposed parkway. The remaining land was under condemnation. With the exception of the disputed canal property, the last outstanding parcels were finally acquired in February 1931.[204]

Fine-Tuning the Design

The design of the parkway continued to evolve as the acquisition process crawled along. As the project matured from schematic renderings to actual plans based on topographical surveys and careful analyses of existing conditions, the District engineer's office and the Commission of Fine Arts gradually devised a parkway landscape that was--in most aspects--agreeable to all parties. Like the convoluted maneuverings surrounding the parkway legislation and land acquisition, however, the design process involved much more than just the straightforward refinement of aesthetic judgments. A close examination of the public and private statements of the agencies and individuals involved in this process reveals the ways in which the interplay between practical concerns, institutional politics, professional rivalries, and personal agendas produced the current parkway landscape. Most of the significant design modifications and concomitant debates that developed between Harts's 1916 plan and the final construction drawings completed in the late 1920s and early 1930s concerned the difficult problem of reconciling the need to provide an efficient transportation route with the desire to preserve and enhance the natural features of the valley.

The problem of determining the desirable balance between scenic improvement and transportation efficiency still vexes contemporary planners, but at this point in parkway development there were few clear precedents for how to proceed. The Bronx River Parkway designers had an advantage in that their project had been conceived early on as a motor road. The property lines and early designs for Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, by contrast, were based on the premise that its primary function was to serve as a quiet, informal park, where narrow, winding paths enforced a leisurely pace that enhanced the sense of separation from the fast-paced city above. The tensions between the seemingly contradictory goals of efficient transportation and scenic preservation were exacerbated by the constricted terrain within which the designers were forced to work. Throughout most of the Bronx River Parkway, the designers had the advantage of more open terrain and gentle topography. This enabled them to work with broader views and more sweeping vistas that were essentially expanded and simplified versions of those found in conventional landscape parks--though distinguished by the forward orientation identified by Charles Eliot II. In the narrow confines of Rock Creek valley, however, the steep banks of the circuitous stream drastically limited forward views and generally prevented the development of extended vistas, either forward or lateral. While

---

[204] Clark, "Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway: Revised Estimates . . .," 19. Mackintosh discovered that Senator Reed Smoot of Utah used his influence in 1921 to secure congressional approval for a small addition west of Ashmead Place and 20th Street that would protect his views of the parkway (59-61). In 1918 Smoot and his neighbor judge advocate general S. T. Ansell solicited Olmsted's support in favor of a similar provision. Olmsted replied that he didn't feel that it was appropriate to comment on the matter, but privately informed Charles Moore that he felt that there were more important tracts to be included should congress decide to grant exceptions to the approved taking lines. With similar disregard for the politics of park design in Washington, Olmsted's 1918 report on Rock Creek Park recommended placing public tennis courts across the road from a very influential congressmen. The Office of Engineers landscape architect pointed this out to other members of the Commission of Fine Arts, who remedied the tactical error. (Letter S. T. Ansell to Olmsted, 1 February 1918; Letter Olmsted to Moore, 8 February 1918; undated memorandum Caemmerer to Greenleaf; all in Rock Creek Park Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives).

later treatises on parkway design give considerable attention to the enframent of forward vistas, the drawings and correspondence of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway's landscape architects devote little attention to this topic. Instead, the designers concentrated on the more general goal of retaining as much of the original forest as possible to foster a park-like sense of seclusion despite the parkway's relatively narrow right-of-way. As the acquisition process dragged on and development began to crowd the edges of the valley, it became apparent that several key aspects of the original plan would have to be modified in order to preserve the desired segregation of the main parkway drive from the surrounding city. The desire to visually isolate parkway users in a tree-lined corridor with minimal views of neighboring roads and buildings resulted in the gradual elimination of many of the proposed access drives and virtually all of the planned border roads.

In September 1924, Harts's successor, Sherrill, approved a new series of maps of the proposed parkway drawn by Office of Engineers landscape architect Irving W. Payne and his assistant Thomas C. Jeffers.[205] These new maps contained several significant departures from the 1916 design, so Sherrill submitted them to the Commission of Fine Arts for approval. Sherrill's accompanying letter shows that the conditions along the lower Rock Creek valley had not improved measurably since Harts's 1916 report. Lamenting his inability to secure funding to clean up the situation, Sherrill reminded the Commission of Fine Arts that:

> The area of the parkway, particularly the lower part, is in such horribly unsightly condition that it appears to me very essential that the improvement be pushed as rapidly as possible to remove one of the worst eyesores in Washington.[206]

The Commission of Fine Arts had been established in 1910 to guide the development of art and architecture in the national capital. The commission's vision was largely shaped by the recommendations of the McMillan report, and several of its members had served on that seminal body. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., in particular, played a prominent role on both commissions, where he was a leading exponent of the value of professionally designed and managed park systems. Olmsted Jr., had assumed his father's mantle as one of the preeminent figures in the rapidly growing field of landscape architecture. Like his famous father, the younger Olmsted--he tended to drop the "Jr."--was an outspoken proponent of the need to "professionalize" the practice of landscape architecture, lecturing widely and contributing numerous articles on the subject to Landscape

---

[205] Irving Payne graduated from the Harvard University School of Landscape Architecture in 1917, where he would undoubtedly have studied under Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. He began working for the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds on 1 September 1918 as a landscape architect at the salary of $200 a month. He was granted a leave-of-absence to do postgraduate work at the Cornell University summer school in July-August 1921. (Letter, Ridley to Chief of Engineers, 26 August 1918; memorandum, Sherrill to Chief of Engineers, 21 June 1921; Office of the Chief of Engineers Document File, 1894-1923, Record Group 77, National Archives).

Thomas C. Jeffers, Sr., was another alumni of the Olmsted firm, having worked for Olmsted Brothers in Brookline from 1911-17. He served as a landscape architect in the Construction Division of the U.S. Army from February 1918 until January 1923, when he began working for the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks. Jeffers advanced to become a major force in the shaping of Washington's parks and parkways. In 1930 he became the landscape architect in charge of design for the National Capital Park and Planning Commission. He continued working for the NCP&PC until his death in 1952. In addition to overseeing the completion of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, Jeffers was involved in the development of George Washington Memorial Parkway, Suitland Parkway, Baltimore-Washington Parkway and the Recreation System Plan for the District of Columbia. ("Thomas C. Jeffers, Sr., A Biographical Minute," Landscape Architecture 47 (July 1952): 173-74).

[206] Letter, Sherrill to Moore, 25 September 1925, quoted in Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 8 October 1925, National Commission of Fine Arts Archives.

HABS
DC
WASH
632-

Architecture, American City, and other influential journals. The prolonged debates over the establishment and design of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway provided Olmsted with a conspicuous forum to express both his aesthetic judgements and his conception of professionalism in the practice of landscape architecture.

Olmsted had strongly influenced the McMillan Commission's original recommendations for the development of the parkway. As the landscape architecture member of the Commission of Fine Arts, he was largely responsible for that commission's official statements about the parkway during the 1910s. Olmsted had retired from the commission before Payne and Jeffers produced the 1924 plans, but Moore wrote him in September 1925 requesting he review the new drawings anyway. Olmsted agreed, replying that he would like to go over the site with someone from Sherrill's office who was familiar with the new plans. One of Olmsted's recurrent themes was that landscape architects needed to closely examine proposed improvements "on the ground," rather than design in the studio from maps and *a priori* aesthetic guidelines. In late September, Olmsted spent four hours in the company of Moore and H. P. Caemmerer of the NCPC, comparing the grounds of the parkway with copies of the old and new plans. Olmsted then dashed off a series of observations and sent them to Moore, along with a lengthy memorandum on the general subject of border roads for parkways. These recommendations and subsequent revisions illuminate the specific design issues involved in the final design stages of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and express Olmsted's influential views on contemporary landscape architecture theory and practice.[207]

Olmsted prefaced his remarks by noting that the new drawings proposed some "striking changes" to the earlier proposals. His primary objection was the decision to shift the main parkway drive to the east side of Rock Creek just past the Q Street Bridge, instead of keeping it on the west side and crossing at the base of Lyons Mill Road. Olmsted opposed this change from both aesthetic and practical standpoints. Moving the road to the east side of the creek at this point would require cutting deeply into the steep bank below Sheridan Circle. Olmsted warned that this maneuver posed a serious risk of landslides that could have grave consequences for both the parkway drive and the abutting properties. Olmsted also complained that the widening required to place the roadway on the east side of the creek would eliminate an attractive stand of large trees that concealed the backs of abutting houses. He presented similar objections to the proposed access road that was shown running up the east side of the valley from a point near the site of Lyons Mill, claiming that it would destroy an irreplaceable stretch of mature forest. "To wipe out of existence a long stretch of existing woods of great natural beauty," he wrote, "would be a terrible sacrifice of park values and in my opinion can not be justified." If the engineer's office ruled that traffic requirements necessitated the revisions, however, he suggested that extensive and well-designed retaining walls be constructed to minimize the destruction of the surrounding forest and eliminate the landslide danger. The guiding principle of the parkway's design, he asserted, should be to give "the most painstaking and appreciative consideration to what can be preserved of the natural sylvan beauty of the valley while securing adequate means of travel through it." When the two goals conflicted, Olmsted tended to press for the retention of park values rather than the single-minded pursuit of traffic efficiency. Acknowledging that his recommendations might significantly slow construction, Olmsted advised that it was "better to delay

---

[207] Letter, Moore to Olmsted, 15 September 1925; Letter, Olmsted to Moore, received 23 September 1925; Olmsted's Report on Rock Creek Parkway, handwritten and typed copies, 26 September 1925; Olmsted typescript "Memorandum as to 'Border Roads' for Parks and Parkways," 25 September 1925; in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives.

opening some or all of the roads intended to make the parkway accessible than open them in such a way as to destroy the beauty which it is their purpose to make accessible."[208]

Olmsted suggested a compromise between the old and new plans, bringing the main drive across Rock Creek about 500' north of Dumbarton Bridge. In his analysis of the proposed construction north of the Dumbarton Bridge, Olmsted again refused to let purported traffic needs compromise the scenic qualities of the parkway landscape. He contended that it was "unnecessary" and "undesirable" to cut off the bottom of Mount Zion Cemetery by putting the main parkway drive on the west side of the creek, and suggested that the idea of turning the old Lyons Mill Road into a major access drive should be abandoned. He argued that the old dirt road was too steep and narrow, and more suited to use as a footpath than as automobile access. Olmsted maintained that this was a picturesque and secluded segment of the parkway and should remain so. He advised replacing the proposed access road with an unobtrusive footpath. While eliminating access roads in this area might slightly inconvenience motorists wanting to enter the parkway from Georgetown, Olmsted felt it was important to preserve "the sylvan character of the two cemeteries, rather than make it into a roadway denuded of its trees and bushes."[209]

To further protect the scenic quality of the valley bottom, Olmsted proposed eliminating the creekside drive from Lyons Mill to a point about 500 yards north of Massachusetts Avenue. He recommended shifting the main parkway drive away from the creek to an old road that traversed the east side of the valley (now known as Waterside Drive). At Massachusetts Avenue, this drive would pass under a short bridge before gradually descending once again to the valley floor. Olmsted presented this configuration as a means of preserving the natural beauty of the valley floor while simultaneously reducing construction costs. Raising the driveway out of the valley at this point, he wrote, "would permit the retention of a vastly greater proportion of the natural growth which gives charm to this part of the valley." These sentiments, together with his other pleas for retaining scenic values even when they conflicted with efficient transportation, underscore Olmsted's status as a transitional figure in parkway design. When forced to choose between the often contradictory functions of "park" and "way," Olmsted--at this point in his career--often ruled in favor of the former. Olmsted's 1925 memorandum suggests that he clearly valued the traditional park aspects of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway over its ability to function as an efficient motorway. Routing motorists to the top of the valley was not the most practical solution from a highway-engineering standpoint, but Olmsted favored this configuration because it made for a better general-purpose park by "leaving a very lovely part of the creek bottom lands in a substantially natural condition for the use of people on foot and horseback." Olmsted's insistence on preserving this section of the creek bottom as a untouched park-within-a-park was not shared by the Commission of Fine Arts, who realized it would be overruled by the more pragmatically minded District engineer's office.[210]

To augment his aesthetic arguments, Olmsted attempted to make a case for the utility of separating the parkway drive from the creek. He argued that a low-level drive in this area would

---

[208] Olmsted's report on Rock Creek Parkway, 26 September 1925, typed copy, pp. 2-4, in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives.

[209] Olmsted, "Report on Rock Creek Parkway," 3.

[210] Olmsted, "Report on Rock Creek Parkway," 3-5.

require extensive retaining walls and substantial filling in order to raise it above the floodplain. He also claimed that his scheme would improve access to Massachusetts Avenue while eliminating the long, expensive, and unsightly tunnel through the Massachusetts Avenue embankment called for in the 1924 plans. Olmsted believed that an attractive bridge should replace the earthen embankment that carried Massachusetts Avenue across the valley anyway, but acknowledged that Congress was unlikely to approve funding for such an expensive project.[211]

Olmsted's report dwelt at length on the subject of border roads. The McMillan Commission's 1902 parkway proposals had called for tree-lined avenues extending along either side of the parkway. These had been retained, with moderate revisions, in subsequent versions of the parkway design. Drawing on the example of existing formal boulevards such as Boston's Commonwealth Avenue, late nineteenth-century parkway designers assumed that some form of bordering streets were an essential element of parkway design. Their primary purpose was to divert commercial traffic from the central roadway while providing access to abutting residences. In the "Memorandum as to 'Border Roads' for Parks and Parkways" accompanying his recommendations, Olmsted outlined several additional benefits. Border roads encouraged builders to construct their houses facing the parkway, so that parkway users were not confronted with the unsightly views of backyards and the backs of houses that blighted train and electric railway rights-of-way. Border roads also enhanced adjacent property values, since houses advertised as facing on a parkway could command a higher price. In return, handsome houses facing the parkway served a public function by providing a more pleasant prospect for parkway users. Olmsted suggested that the increase in property values caused by parkway improvements would even encourage abutting landowners to allow more of their grounds to be taken for parkway creation. A further argument in favor of border roads was that they provided a distinct edge to the parkway, and thus reduced policing and maintenance problems. Backyards bordering directly on the parkway provided an invitation to dump refuse or otherwise encroach upon parkway property.[212]

Olmsted identified four types of parkways in which the treatment of border roads posed a significant design issue. The first was an elongated park intended to connect two or more larger parks without interrupting the feeling of being in a natural setting. The proposed treatment of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was a prime example of this form. The second type was essentially an ordinary street that had been enhanced with plantings by developers to increase property values, but only incidentally conceived as a public amenity. Olmsted gave little consideration to this category, since such streets were generally too narrow to encompass border roads. The third type consisted of ornamental avenues that were attractively embellished and often quite broad and park-like, but which nevertheless formed a regular part of the city traffic pattern. Variously termed "thoroughfares," "boulevards," "avenues," and "parkways," what distinguished these from the first type was that they were not isolated park environments but essentially urban or suburban landscapes, where the flanking buildings rather than natural surroundings determined the overall character. The discarded closed-valley plan exemplified this configuration, and border roads would have been considered a definite necessity had this treatment been adopted. The fourth type of parkway was a hybrid between types one and three, in which buildings lined one side but park-like features occupied the other and supplied

---

[211] Olmsted, "Report on Rock Creek Parkway," 2-5.

[212] Olmsted, "Memorandum as to 'Border Roads'...," 7-14.

the dominating visual impression. Olmsted cited Boston's Riverway as a prime example of this form. Olmsted's extended discussion of these alternative parkway forms--which appeared shortly thereafter as an article in Landscape Architecture--demonstrates that, even as late as 1925, the term "parkway" denoted a wide variety of landscape treatments, and was not yet synonymous with single-purpose motor roads. This more inclusive definition would rapidly fade with the increasing dominance of the automobile and the rapid growth of motor parkways around New York, Washington, and other major cities.[213]

Olmsted stressed that it was impossible to make sweeping judgments when determining the relationship between parkways and border roads. In keeping with his belief that landscape architects must painstakingly fit their designs to individual circumstances, he stated that the decision to use border roads should be based on close scrutiny of local topographic conditions, future development potential, and the intended use of the parkway. Olmsted declared that the question of border roads was most complex in the first type of parkway. In the second and third types, the width of the street served as a fairly straightforward determinant: if the city or developer wanted to make the additional investment to provide park strips and border roads, they would doubtlessly improve the finished product. The drives in the fourth type of parkway were essentially border roads to begin with. With more informal parkways like the proposed development in Rock Creek valley, Olmsted stressed that border roads, while desirable, should only be attempted if there were sufficient room to screen the roads and adjacent houses from travelers on the main parkway drive. Since the point of this type of parkway was to isolate users from the surrounding city, Olmsted maintained that "unpark-like" sights such as buildings and subsidiary roads should not be visible from the main driveway and paths. If this were impossible, then either the border roads should be eliminated, or another form of parkway should be constructed instead. While Olmsted obviously favored the use of border roads, he acknowledged that they should be dispensed with "where limited width or topographic conditions or both make it logically impracticable or inexpedient to provide separate border roads and where abutting property can reasonably be barred off from access to the parkway." He noted that this condition occurred in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway above Q Street, where he recommended that the proposed border roads be deleted. Eventually, this reasoning would be used to eliminate all the formal border roads along the parkway. As the design process progressed and new developments began to box in the valley, it became apparent that the broad parkway landscape envisioned in earlier schemes was unattainable, and that constructing border roads along the edges of the valley would destroy the sense of isolation the parkway was trying to create. Fortunately, the steep and wooded valley walls sufficiently protected parkway users from views of the surrounding city.[214]

Olmsted was highly critical of the proposed treatment of the parkway at the mouth of Rock Creek. He agreed that the elimination of canal traffic made it unnecessary to pursue the 1916 plan's expensive project of separating the creek and canal, but he still urged that the RC&PPC go to great lengths to secure the land along the west side of the creek below K Street. A sand and gravel plant operating on land leased from the canal company dominated the riverfront view at this point. To allow this towering industrial mass to block the view of the river and the undeveloped Virginia shore,

---

[213] Olmsted, "Memorandum as to 'Border Roads'...," 2-3; Frederick Law Olmsted, "Border Roads for Parkways and Parks," Landscape Architecture 16 (October 1925): 74-84.

[214] Olmsted, "Border Roads for Parkways and Parks," 74-84.

Olmsted asserted, would be "a great imperfection in the design of the parkway." Olmsted strongly criticized the current situation as an intolerable desecration of one of the most important points in the whole parkway. He emphasized that the creek mouth served as a critical visual and symbolic juncture, where northbound travelers entered the wooded valley and southbound parkway users first encountered the broad views of the Potomac waterfront. "Considering the strength and persistency of first impressions," he proclaimed, "This is probably the worst place on the whole drive to permit ugly commercial structures to intrude conspicuously on the scenery of the parkway."[215]

Olmsted's final criticisms of the 1924 revisions reflected his conception of the professional landscape architect as a hands-on designer who made extensive excursions in the field in order to gain intimate knowledge of the terrain under consideration. Olmsted dismissed the plan's prettily drawn trees as superficial ornamentation that had nothing to do with actual conditions at the site. Together with the heavy-handed imposition of roadways in some of the most sensitive areas of the proposed parkway, this suggested to him that the creators of the 1924 plans had broken the cardinal rule of professional landscape architecture. Olmsted warned the Commission of Fine Arts that:

> the plan at many points bears the earmarks of having been made mainly in the office without yet having received that patient, time-consuming detailed 'fitting' on the ground, at large scale and with the aid of all available detailed topographical information which is essential in dealing with this peculiar type of landscape problem if the designer is to have any assurance that his solution even approximates the best utilization of the natural opportunities that he has the skill and imagination to devise.[216]

In general, Olmsted tried to be diplomatic in his criticism of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds's designers. He noted that the plan had "many good points," and suggested its defects may have stemmed from the fact that the designers were pressed for time, or had too many other duties to perform, or might have been constrained by circumstances beyond their control. Whatever the reasons for its shortcomings, Olmsted asserted that the 1924 plans needed careful revision by a professionally trained landscape architect. Addressing his former colleagues in a passage summarizing the ideals of contemporary landscape architecture practice:

> I cannot advise the Commission of Fine Arts to approve it until they have evidence that this patient, lahorious process of trying and fitting on the ground in detail has been thoroughly done by a landscape architect alert to all the scenic assets and opportunities of the situation and that he is himself satisfied that the plan embodies and preserves these opportunities and natural assets to the utmost degree consistent with the controlling practical requirements as understood and accepted by the Commission in charge of the work and by the Commission of Fine Arts.[217]

---

[215] Olmsted, "Report on Rock Creek Parkway," 26 September 1925, typed copy, 1-3.

[216] Olmsted, "Report on Rock Creek Parkway," 26 September 1925, 5.

[217] Olmsted, "Report on Rock Creek Parkway," 26 September 1925, 5.; Olmsted's displeasure with Langdon's trees is noted in Memorandum "Inspection of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway," 25 September 1925, 9, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives.

Olmsted closed his report by underscoring both the significance of the project and the need for conscientiously adhering to professional standards in the practice of landscape architecture. With equally strained syntax, he intoned:

> The importance of the project is too great, the natural scenic assets and opportunities of the situation are too notable, the difficulties of avoiding needless and irreparable sacrifice of these opportunities and assets are too numerous and intricate throughout almost the whole course of the parkway, the danger of falling into such sacrifices needlessly is too imminent and serious, to justify the Commission of Fine Arts in taking any chances by perfunctorily approving a general plan and trusting to its subsequent perfection in detailed adjustments on the cumulative effect of which the success or failure of final result would mainly depend.[218]

The Commission of Fine Arts considered Olmsted's recommendations along with additional suggestions put forth by members Charles Moore and John Greenleaf. The commission then prepared a report for Sherrill's office conveying its official recommendations, including most of Olmsted's suggestions and frequently appropriating his persuasive language. The commission asserted that it "deplored" the industrial facilities near the creek mouth, repeating Olmsted's elaboration of the significance of that portion of the parkway. The commission also forwarded Olmsted's criticisms of the revised plans for the Dumbarton Bridge area, with Moore strongly seconding Olmsted's assessment of the danger the proposed grading along the east bank of the parkway would involve. The commission endorsed a recommendation by Greenleaf that the main parkway drive north of Massachusetts Avenue be shifted to the east side of the creek and then proceed around the east side of the zoo boundary to Adams Mill Road. The report advised that moving the drive to the east side of the creek above Massachusetts Avenue would be less destructive of the attractive scenery in the upper valley. This revision would eliminate the need for heavy excavation about halfway between Massachusetts Avenue and Connecticut Avenue, thus sparing "a large number of beautiful beech and oak trees." The Adams Mill Road idea was an attempt to solve the problem of fashioning an east side access road through the steeply sloping area near the two bridges. It also appeared to provide an effective means of getting around the zoo and into Rock Creek Park. The commission asked that steps be taken to acquire this land from the Smithsonian Institution, which was responsible for the National Zoo. The Commission of Fine Arts requested more detailed maps and concluded with a slightly revised version of Olmsted's sermon on the importance of entrusting the final design to professionally trained landscape architects.[219]

The apparent unity of the Commission of Fine Arts' report belied some crafty maneuvering designed to trade on Olmsted's prestige without forwarding opinions contrary to the commission's desires. The official report relied heavily on Olmsted's comments, using his words both with and without attribution. But in two of the project's most controversial areas, the commission either withheld Olmsted's comments or conspired to deny him access to information that might have caused him to contradict their own desires.

---

[218] Olmsted, "Report on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway," 5-6.

[219] Commission of Fine Arts "Report on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway," final version, (sent to Sherrill, 22 October 1925), Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives.

The commission originally intended to transmit Olmsted's report along with its own, knowing that his stature would lend further weight to their arguments. NCPC Director H. P. Caemmerer advised against this strategy after reviewing both reports, noting that Olmsted's disagreement with the commission's recommendations for the Massachusetts Avenue area could cause problems. The commission preferred to keep the low-level road at the bottom of the valley from the Lyons Mill site to Massachusetts Avenue. This meant the park drive might have to pass through a 250' tunnel under the embankment, but it circumvented the extensive grading and retaining wall construction along the east side of the valley that Olmsted considered preferable to the destruction of creekside scenery. While the District engineer would probably have concurred with the commission's position anyway, the commission took Caemmerer's advice and never forwarded Olmsted's report to the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds.[220]

Olmsted, in turn, was not sent a copy of the 1924 "Alternative General Plan for Section No. 1." This drawing demonstrated a proposal for the terminus of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway at Arlington Memorial Bridge plaza that was designed to ease congestion at what was expected to become a heavily traveled intersection. Rather than route traffic from the bridge around the plaza and directly north along the seawall, the alternate plan sent motorists underneath the Arlington Memorial Bridge abutments and across the ceremonial Watergate steps. Theoretically, the alternate plan merely sought to anticipate future growth, including this treatment as an option for later use. The disputed design provided extra arches under the bridge's east abutment and the seawall, which the engineers claimed would remain concealed behind stone facing until some distant date in the future when traffic needs required their use.

The inclusion of this option among the official parkway plans infuriated Greenleaf. Greenleaf claimed that the proposed roadway would destroy the dignified balance the commission had sought to achieve between the bridge, the parkway, the Watergate stairs, and the terminus of the Mall. While a bridle path had been contemplated for this location, he was appalled at the idea of "shooting" a motor road across the ceremonial gateway to Washington. This was one of the most symbolically important landscapes in the entire nation, Greenleaf argued. He was enraged by the prospect that traffic engineers might succeed in using crude utilitarian considerations to overrule the refined opinions of the country's most prominent designers. The Commission of Fine Arts stood wholeheartedly behind Greenleaf on this matter. Before the final plans were drawn up, the commission wrested a "gentleman's agreement" from Sherrill's office guaranteeing that the alternative treatment would be eliminated from consideration. When it reappeared on the official plans, Greenleaf unleashed a series of angry letters to Moore and Caemmerer urging that extreme steps be taken to ensure that the alternate plan be "entirely and definitively suppressed." Greenleaf was so concerned that the alternate plan might come back to "confuse" or "befog" the situation that he demanded the alternate plan be "obliterated from the records of the Bridge and Rock Creek Parkway Commissions."[221]

As part of his campaign to suppress the offending roadway, Greenleaf advised Moore not to send "Alternative General Plan for Section No. 1" to Olmsted. Citing Olmsted's tendency "to fix

---

[220] Letter, Caemmerer to Greenleaf, 12 October 1925, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives.

[221] Letter, Greenleaf to Moore, 16 September 1925; Letter, Greenleaf to Moore, 2 October 1925; Letter, Greenleaf to Caemmerer, 15 October 1925, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives.

upon some one point and elaborate it out of due proportion," Greenleaf warned that sending Olmsted this scheme would risk having "a prominent ex-member of the Commission going against us and deciding this all important matter on the basis of a relatively minor traffic question." To press his point, Greenleaf painted a picture of Olmsted becoming fixated with the traffic issue and approving of the engineers's plan, to the detriment of "the vital and tremendously important time enduring subject of adequate balancing and design at the terminal of the Mall, the surrounding of the Lincoln Memorial, and the approaches of the Monumental Bridge." Moore replied immediately, confidentially assuring Greenleaf that the "pesky" alternative plan would not be sent to Olmsted.[222]

The Commission of Fine Arts' 1925 report strongly opposed the alternate proposal, but to little avail. The aesthetic and symbolic attraction of an unbroken ceremonial promenade from the Potomac waterfront to the heart of the Mall was no match for the pragmatic appeal of reduced traffic congestion. The prospect of huge traffic jams accompanying the opening of the long-awaited Arlington Memorial Bridge forced the commission to "reluctantly" give its consent to the alternate plan in September 1927.[223]

The Commission of Fine Arts' aesthetic sensibilities also collided with practical traffic demands over the proposed reconstruction of the M Street Bridge. The ensuing dispute epitomized the contentious debates surrounding the parkway's protracted development, pitting engineers against architects, the pragmatism of District Commissioners and Georgetown citizens against the aesthetic idealism of the Commission of Fine Arts, and City Beautiful advocates against the eternally parsimonious Congress.

In 1925 the District commissioners condemned the existing M Street Bridge, which had been built in 1872 and was in dangerous condition. Harts had foreseen this development in his suggestion to relocate M Street traffic to a replacement bridge at N Street. The Georgetown Citizens' Association opposed Harts's proposal, arguing that a bridge at N Street would direct heavy traffic through a residential neighborhood. They demanded that the M Street Bridge be rebuilt as soon as possible, since its closing restricted the already limited traffic flow across the valley. Employing the same concerted action through which closed-valley advocates nearly outmaneuvered earlier City Beautiful devotees, the Georgetown Citizens' Association and the West End Citizens' Association stole the march on proponents of an expensive and time-consuming arched concrete bridge. In March 1926, these groups spearheaded legislation to secure a $250,000 appropriation from Congress to replace the closed M Street Bridge with a simple steel-girder span. The District engineer's office quickly presented the Commission of Fine Arts with plans for an unimposing masonry-covered steel-girder structure.[224]

The Commission of Fine Arts was outraged by the spare, utilitarian appearance of the District engineer's bridge. In mid 1927 the commission informed U. S. Grant III, director of Public Buildings and Public Parks, that it could not compromise its aesthetic principles by sanctioning the

---

[222] Letter, Greenleaf to Moore, 16 September 1925; Letter, Moore to Greenleaf, 18 September 1925, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives.

[223] "Tunnel Construction under Memorial Bridge Pier O.K.'d to Prevent Future Congestion," Washington Evening Star, 20 September 1927.

[224] "New M Street Bridge Held Aid to Georgetown," Washington Post, 13 March 1926.

engineer's ungainly design. It asserted that all new bridges across the parkway should meet the standard of artistic excellence set forth by the graceful Connecticut Avenue and Dumbarton bridges. The commission favored an alternative design developed by the municipal architect, which it claimed was much more suitable for such a highly visible parkway structure. Grant responded sympathetically, acknowledging that the District engineer's design was not ideal from an aesthetic standpoint, but he reminded the commission that the legislation providing funds for the bridge specifically called for the erection of a steel-girder construction. In addition, Grant insisted, the municipal architect's design could not possibly be constructed with Congress's meager appropriation. Additional funding could not be secured without imposing a significant delay. Given Congress's record on funding District improvements, Grant hinted, sufficient funding might not be forthcoming at all.[225]

The D.C. Board of Commissioners politely implored the Commission of Fine Arts to reconsider, citing the language of the appropriations bill and the lack of funds for a more elaborate treatment. The board of commissioners tried to strike a conciliatory tone, stating that the bridge engineer would gladly embellish his design with whatever ornamental treatment the Commission of Fine Arts deemed appropriate. This suggestion infuriated Chairman Charles Moore, who angrily responded that the Commission of Fine Arts did not deal with mere ornament, but with fundamental principles of design. "A bridge is primarily a question of architecture," he asserted, and should be designed by an architect. The engineer's design was inherently flawed, Moore claimed, and no amount of "ornament" could repair such a bad scheme. Proportion, not ornamentation, was the issue.

Moore pointed to new the Key Bridge as an example of a beautiful, unornamented bridge that relied on simple, harmonious proportions for artistic effect. The engineer's design, in contrast, was clumsily proportioned and inconsistent with the monumental character of the other parkway bridges. Moore declared, "The plans submitted are not suited to a park structure, and they cannot be made suitable, because the design is fundamentally bad. A bridge constructed along such lines would be a perpetual eyesore." The architect's bridge, according to Moore, was truly a "park bridge." It represented "a marked improvement over the sketches shown by the street engineers . . . a lighter, more graceful design." Moore's letter defiantly reaffirmed the Commission of Fine Arts's rejection of the engineer's submission and demanded that the municipal architect's office be given permission to redesign the bridge.[226]

Proctor Dougherty, president of the D.C. Board of Commissioners, once again informed the Commission of Fine Arts that the legislation called for a steel-girder bridge. Dougherty reminded Moore that Congress had made this decision, and that the Commission of Fine Arts was not empowered to overturn it. Regretting the commission's disapproval, he informed Moore that the bridge would be built in accordance with the engineer's plan. Dougherty included a set of final drawings prepared by the bridge department, attempting to smooth things over by noting that "every effort has been made to meet the criticisms of the preliminary design without departing from the steel-

---

[225] Letter, Grant to Moore, 5 May 1927; Letter, Grant to Moore, 24 May 1927, M Street Bridge Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives.

[226] Letter, Proctor Dougherty, president of D. C. Board of Commissioners, to Moore, 14 November 1927; Letter, Moore to Board of Commissioners, 27 September 1927; Letter, Moore to Proctor Dougherty, President, Board of Commissioners, 28 November 1927; M Street Bridge Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives.

girder type." Moore angrily replied that the proposed design was still "conspicuously bad." He repeated his assertion that the engineer's bridge would be a "perpetual eyesore" and stated that it would permanently mar "an essential portion of the park system of the District of Columbia." Moore appealed to Caemmerer, who enlisted Representative Cramton of the House Committee on the District of Columbia to exert his influence on the board of commissioners. Cramton wrote Dougherty, repeating that the problem with the board of commissioner's bridge was that "it was designed by an engineer, instead of an architect." He echoed the Commission of Fine Arts' argument, asserting that, "As a result the bridge lacks architectural motives, and to carry out the plan would result in a bridge not in keeping with what has been established as an appropriate type of bridge to cross Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway."[227]

The battle over the M Street Bridge spilled into the newspapers and the halls of Congress. In March 1928 the Evening Star gave favorable coverage to the Commission of Fine Arts' point of view, quoting Moore's "perpetual eyesore" and "conspicuously bad" characterizations. The newspaper was attentive to both sides of the issue, however, covering citizens's protests over the delay caused by the commission's stance and noting that they had a legitimate complaint, since the bridge had been closed for three years. Representatives of the West End Citizens' Association were quoted to the effect that they were tired of being neglected and mistreated. They contended that the added beauty of the architect's proposal was not worth the projected delay or expense. The Washington Post came out directly in favor of the engineer's scheme editorializing that the bridge was "badly needed and the work should be started as soon as possible, notwithstanding the criticism of the Commission of Fine Arts."[228]

The M Street Bridge disagreement escalated into a major test of the Commission of Fine Arts' authority--and, by extension--of public willingness to support expensive municipal improvements. When the Board of Commissioners announced its intention to press on despite the Commission of Fine Arts' disapproval, it underscored the commission's lack of enforcement power and threatened to undermine its influence on the future development of Washington. The Commission of Fine Arts had been created as an advisory body with no real regulatory authority. Throughout the controversy, the D.C. Board of Commissioners emphasized the Commission of Fine Art' advisory status. The commissioners claimed that they had done their duty by submitting the disputed design for review, but were not legally bound to follow the Commission of Fine Arts' suggestions. Speaking before the House Appropriation's subcommittee in 1929, Moore conceded that his commission could not force the District commissioners to abide by its decision, but claimed the D.C. commissioners' action subverted the intent of the law, the will of Congress, and the best interests of the American people. Moore continued to assail the District Engineers' design, publicly accusing the District commissioners of attempting to disfigure Washington's park system by "putting in ugly bridges that are all out of keeping with the other park bridges." Moore testified that the proposed M Street bridge was not a park bridge but "an ugly utilitarian bridge not suited for park

---

[227] Letter, Dougherty to Moore, 9 March 1928; Letter, Moore to Dougherty, 10 March 1928; Letter, Cramton to Dougherty, 30 March 1928; Letter, Caemmerer to Cramton, 3 April 1928; M Street Bridge Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives.

[228] "Arts Group Frowns on M Street Bridge/Present Design Would Create 'Perpetual Eyesore' over Rock Creek Says Report," Washington Evening Star, 12 March 1928; "Bridge Delay Hit By Citizens' Body," Washington Evening Star, 20 March 1928; "Editorial," Washington Post, 30 March 1928.

purposes." If the existing legislation stipulated a steel-span bridge and failed to provide enough money for a proper park bridge, he demanded that Congress change the legislation and approve the additional $75,000 necessary to complete the municipal architect's design. Congressional penny-pinching and public impatience should not be allowed to destroy the park system of the national capital, Moore proclaimed. The Evening Star backed Moore's position, stating that, while the Commission of Fine Arts might not possess legal authority, its advice should be followed unless Congress, and not the D.C. Board of Commissioners, ruled otherwise.[229]

The Commission of Fine Arts' pleas failed to sway Congress, however, and the M Street Bridge was constructed according to the District engineers' plans. The Evening Star tried to make the best of the situation in an April 1929 editorial on "Washington's Bridges." The paper suggested that, while the chosen design glaringly reflected the engineer's admission that "with a limited appropriation beauty must be sacrificed to unadorned utility," the new M Street Bridge could also be viewed in a positive light as contributing to "that interesting contrast which marks the bridges now spanning Rock Creek." The editorial stated that, like it or not, there was ample precedent for the M Street structure's utilitarian form among the other parkway bridges. The Evening Star reported:

> The old Calvert Street bridge, with its ugly skeleton of steel work, remains as a companion to the Connecticut Avenue bridge; the ramshackle P Street bridge, by reason of its proximity to the Q Street bridge, teaches an interesting lesson in the old and new ideas of bridge building, while the M Street bridge, another structure of steel, will carry out the same thought in its relation to the Pennsylvania Avenue bridge, a stone's throw away.[230]

The Commission of Fine Arts probably did not share the newspaper's new-found appreciation for utilitarian bridges. In some ways, however, the commission's defeat turned out to be a blessing in disguise. The M Street Bridge debacle provided the commission with additional ammunition to lobby Congress for greater enforcement power. The Shipstead-Luce Act, passed in 1930, gave the commission authority to dictate the appearance of all structures within view of parks and public buildings.

The parkway designers were occasionally more skillful at manipulating public opinion in favor of artistic but costly improvements. Promoters of the open-valley plan had viewed the earthen embankment carrying Massachusetts Avenue over Rock Creek as a major obstacle ever since it was constructed in 1901. Virtually everyone agreed that the various tunnel plans were unsatisfactory, and that the best thing to do was to remove the embankment and replace it with an attractive bridge. Past experience, however, taught the parkway designers that there was little chance of obtaining funding for such an expensive project based on aesthetic recommendations alone. In October 1925, Sherrill concocted a plan to swing public support behind the bridge proposal. Sherrill informed Moore that it would be possible to build a narrow causeway on the east side of the conduit carrying Rock Creek through the embankment. The parkway could be conveyed under the embankment in this fashion, but the causeway would be uncomfortably narrow, and high water would force its closure during rainy

---

[229] "May Build Bridge Despite Protest/Commissioners Indicate Fine Arts Disapproval will not Balk Project," Washington Evening Star, 29 March 1928; "Art Versus Law," Washington Evening Star, 30 March 1928; "Rock Creek Park Bridges Held Ugly," Washington Evening Star, 16 January 1929.

[230] "Washington's Bridges," Washington Evening Star, 12 April 1929.

periods. Sherrill predicted, "The public will thus begin in a short time to realize the necessity of a handsome arch bridge and will accordingly support an appropriation for it."[231]

Sherrill's successor, Ulysses S. Grant III, demonstrated similar guile in 1927. Responding to Moore's displeasure at the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks' failure to secure the Commission of Fine Arts's approval to use steel trusses salvaged from Georgetown's old Aqueduct Bridge to carry the parkway across Rock Creek above K Street and below Connecticut Avenue, Grant encouraged Moore to regard the unsightly spans as temporary expedients calculated to increase public support for improvements to the parkway. Grant wrote Moore:

> I am convinced that opening such an additional stretch of the new Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and making it available will create public demand for more rapid continuation of the work and obtain a more sympathetic hearing for my request for more adequate appropriations for this work.

Grant stated that Moore himself had advocated this strategy in past projects. Grant maintained that he was just following Moore's advise that, "If the public can be induced to begin the use of even part of an important project, it will soon begin to appreciate the value of the project and insist upon its completion in more adequate form." These "temporary" bridges remained in place for about ten years, but when they were replaced it was in response to complaints of just the sort that Grant and Sherrill envisioned. In the meantime, a number of additional adjustments were worked out to provide the parkway with the basics of its present form.[232]

The major remaining departures from earlier plans were a continued reduction in the number of access roads and the gradual elimination of all border roads that didn't already exist as part of the existing city street plan. These deviations from the original parkway concept were dictated in large part by the realization that the land reserved for the parkway was not wide enough to construct border roads without drastically impinging on the desired parkway experience. The rise of the automobile, with its requirement of wider, more substantially constructed roadways, undoubtedly contributed to the elimination of border roads and of several proposed access routes. Had all these roadways been squeezed into the narrow confines of Rock Creek valley, the result would have been a landscape that was distinctly less "park" and more "way," with multiple thoroughfares dominating the intervening hands of greenery. As with many later parkways designed expressly for automobile traffic, the roadways themselves would have vied with the surrounding landscape for the motorist's attention, or even become the dominant feature in the parkway composition. By leaving the sides of the valley clothed in towering trees--and reforesting stretches where the original cover had been removed--the parkway designers immersed motorists in a sea of greenery that overpowered the visual presence of the narrow and twisting roadway.

The elimination of border roads created an informal, naturalistic landscape that was consistent with the landscape architecture profession's movement away from the more elaborately orchestrated

---

[231] Letter, Sherrill to Moore, 26 October 1925; Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives. In October 1925 Jeffers and Payne drew a section diagramming this treatment. The drawing shows a 30' roadway on the east side of the conduit and bears the handwritten notation "this road will probably be under water during rain storm."

[232] Grant to Moore, 7 June 1927, M Street Bridge Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives.

compositions favored by earlier park designers. Early projections of the parkway landscape presented the border roads as visually and symbolically distinct elements of a more open, varied, and demonstrably "composed" landscape. The hypothetical sections prepared for the McMillan Report and for the 1908 and 1916 reports stressed the distinction between the low, irregular plantings and asymmetrical clearings of the informal landscape park along the valley bottom and the regular rows of stately trees that were to line the formal residential avenues at the valley's edges. By the late 1920s, when parks were increasingly promoted as natural, woodsy environments rather than as complex scenic creations, these earlier configurations may have seemed fussy and artificial. The parkway designers may also have realized that most of its users would be speeding through in automobiles, and therefore unlikely to appreciate the complex picturesque effects proposed in the earlier designs. In addition, greater familiarity with the practical considerations of the site may have revealed that the valley was too narrow and steep to achieve the spacious visual effects portrayed in overly optimistic preliminary sketches. Another factor contributing to the elimination of border roads may have been that, with most of the surrounding land already developed, there was little likelihood that they would serve the desired function of promoting the construction of attractive houses facing the parkway. On the contrary, by this time, border roads would have had the negative effect of stripping away the trees that concealed the backs of houses already built along nearby city streets.

The 1924 revisions began the process of eliminating the border roads by dropping the short segments between I and K streets. Both Olmsted and the Commission of Fine Arts were noncommittal about this modification. They agreed that these border roads were unnecessary as long as the area remained in industrial use, but warned they would be desirable if houses were to built along the lower portion of the parkway. Olmsted initiated the next omission by recommending against the proposed border road on the east side of the parkway above Q Street. Upon learning in October 1926 that a swimming pool and bathhouse were being planned adjacent to the junior high school east of the parkway at N Street, Olmsted urged that plans for the parkway be finalized as soon as possible to ward against other such encroachments. The swimming pool and school building made it impossible to secure an adequate border road along the east side in this region without marring the view from the valley below. Olmsted concluded that it would be best to just eliminate the entire east-side border road from Pennsylvania Avenue to Massachusetts Avenue. Given the width of the lower parkway and the nature of the surrounding street system, Olmsted declared that a border road would be an expensive mistake that "would cause the destruction of many important existing trees forming the natural enframent of the valley scenery and would otherwise impair the public value of the parkway." Olmsted decided there was also no need for a border road on the west side between Q Street and Olive Street. He also pronounced the proposed access roads crossing the creek from 23rd and 25th streets unnecessary, thus preserving the open character of the P Street bend.[233]

The Commission of Fine Arts seconded Olmsted's recommendations and extended his reasoning to delete the border roads on both sides of the valley between Pennsylvania and Q Street. Existing residential development and topographical considerations precluded construction of the proposed border roads north of Massachusetts Avenue. The cemeteries and Montrose Park obviated the need for a protective border road on the west side of the valley above Q Street, while Waterside Drive complicated matters on the east side. Moore asked Grant to have his office prepare maps

---

[233] Olmsted, "Report on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway," 25 September 1925; Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Project File, Commission of Pine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives.

embodying the new recommendations as soon as possible, and the border roads were eliminated from the final construction drawings. Several more details regarding minor roadway alignment and creek channeling remained to be worked out, but--after almost a half century of contestation--the design of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was essentially settled.[234]

Construction

Even before the acquisition and design process was finished, limited efforts were underway to clear brush and rubbish from the parkway and to construct a preliminary bridle path. The rapid construction of a rudimentary bridle path through the lower valley reflected the parkway designers's belief that the best way to obtain funding was to quickly encourage public use so that popular demand would increase pressure for further improvements. Bridle path construction began in 1923 and received considerable press coverage: after thirty years of official pronouncements and legislative maneuvering, the public was finally able to see some physical progress toward the proposed parkway. In August 1923, the Washington Herald announced, "Bridle Path, Linking Parks, Cheers Riders/Horsemen Saved Long Trip on City Streets by Direct Route Through Rock Creek Valley." The Evening Star followed with articles headlined: "New Bridle Path Soon to be Ready" and "New Bridle Path to Link Big Parks." Both papers described the bridle path's route along the east side of the lower valley as a great boon to District citizens, though the Evening Star advised that the path between M and P streets was "somewhat heavy in bad weather." The newspaper announced that the new trail, which connected with an existing bridle path running from P Street to Rock Creek Park, would be open in a few weeks, as soon as crossings were finished near the Pennsylvania Avenue and Q Street bridges. The Herald acknowledged that plans for the motorway were still in flux, but praised the timing of the bridle path connection, predicting that newly elected President Coolidge's fondness for horseback riding would elevate the sports's popularity and ensure heavy use of the new bridle path. The Evening Star assured that "extreme efforts will be taken in beautifying the landscape and the various paths and roadways." In addition to praising the current efforts, the Evening Star inserted a gentle push for larger appropriations. Under the subhead "Work to Be Slow," the newspaper cautioned, "The actual work of developing this area will proceed slowly as the necessary funds are made available by Congress."[235] The press continued to detail the parkway's slow progress and chronic funding woes throughout the course of the project. The Office of Public Buildings and Grounds frequently used the sympathetic press to vent its frustration over the lack of financial support that continued to delay the parkway's completion.[236]

---

[234]Commission of Fine Arts report on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, 12 October 1925; Letter, Olmsted to Grant, 26 September 1926; Letter, Moore to Grant, November 2, 1926; Letter, Moore to Grant, 29 September 1926; Memo of approval, 2 March 1929; Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives. During the course of construction, there would be several more minor alterations.

[235]"Bridle Path, Linking Parks, Cheers Riders/Horsemen Saved Long Trip on City Streets by Direct Route Through Rock Creek Valley," Washington Herald, 31 August 1923; "New Bridle Path Soon to Be Ready/Will Connect Potomac and Rock Creek Park Roads When Finished" Washington Evening Star, 14 September 1923; "New Bridle Path to Link Big Parks," Washington Evening Star, 30 September 1923.

[236]"Sherrill to Seek Boulevard Funds," Washington Herald, 30 October 1924; "Potomac Parkway Project Delayed," Washington Evening Star, 5 December 1924; Filling Last Link in Long Parkway," Washington Evening Star, 27 February 1927; "Plan Excavating on New Parkway," Washington Evening Star, 13 July 1932; "D.C. To Ask Funds for Parkway and Span at P Street," unidentified clipping, P Street Bridge Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives.

Hampered by meager appropriations, work continued sluggishly throughout the 1920s. The enormous task of restoring the valley between Pennsylvania Avenue and P Street began with the clearing of brush and razing of a number of buildings within the parkway boundaries. A few old factories and about twenty houses in the vicinity of 27th and P streets were removed in 1924. The process of evicting tenants and demolishing buildings proceeded slowly. Several commercial buildings near the Pennsylvania Avenue Bridge were leased back to former owners until 1928. Quite a few houses on government-owned land along Pennsylvania Avenue, P Street, M Street, and Dumbarton Street remained occupied into the early 1930s. These were gradually demolished as parkway construction proceeded. One of the most troublesome spots was a junkyard that had grown up behind the old Blue Mouse Theater at the corner of 26th and M streets. This unsightly accumulation of autobodies and assorted scrap metal was finally removed by an unemployment-relief crew in February 1933. The east side of Rock Creek south of Pennsylvania Avenue comprised another eyesore, with the ramshackle structures of an old wagon yard straggling along the bank in the area of the Godey lime kilns. The lime kilns themselves were engulfed in a riot of second-growth vegetation and formed the back wall of a series of sheds erected by the wagon works. These buildings were demolished and the area re-landscaped to form an attractive sylvan setting for the lower bridle path by 1928.[237]

During fall and winter 1926 the stretch of parkway adjacent to the gas company was greatly improved by the removal of ash heaps, rubbish, construction debris, and broken curbs dumped by the street department. Shrubbery was planted, handsome rail fences erected, and extensive areas of lawn seeded to make this stretch of the bridle path as attractive as possible, given the limitations imposed by the giant gas tanks and hulking machinery that loomed on either side. The rest of the waterfront area remained in a sorry state for several more years as Congress repeatedly delayed the appropriation of funds to build a seawall that was needed to expand the width of the parkway along the riverfront between New Hampshire Avenue and West Potomac Park. The lack of funding also held up work on the Titanic Memorial, which was intended to commemorate the self-sacrifice of the men who stayed with the stricken ocean liner so that most of the women and children aboard could survive. The proposed memorial consisted of an 18' tall figure of a partially clad man standing with arms outstretched, sculpted by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, positioned in the center of an excedra designed by Lincoln Memorial architect Henry Bacon. The Women's Titanic Association had raised $50,000 to pay for this memorial. The association secured permission from the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds to erect the monument on the Potomac side of the parkway across from New Hampshire Avenue, but construction could not begin until the seawall was in place. The Office of Public Buildings and Grounds began to fill in around the proposed memorial site in March 1925, but

---

[237] "Rock Creek Valley Parkway Assured/Authorities, Having 90 Per Cent of Land Needed, Begin Preliminary Work," Washington Evening Star, 17 August 1924; the Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital for the years 1926-31 contains lists of demolitions and privately occupied buildings on parkway land; the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds/National Capital Parks photographs in the Washingtoniana Collection at the Martin Luther King Memorial Library includes several hundred captioned and dated photographs of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway construction, which provide information on the Blue Mouse Theater and lime kiln areas as well as other construction details.

suspended work in October when it became apparent their efforts would be washed away without the seawall in place.[238]

The upper section of the parkway, between Massachusetts Avenue and the zoo, was the first to be completed for automobile use. Widely regarded as the most attractive section of the parkway, it also required the least major construction. Except for the narrow causeway carrying the parkway through the Massachusetts Avenue embankment, the only heavy construction in this section involved shifting the creek channel slightly westward upstream of Massachusetts Avenue to afford easier passage around some cliffs on the east side of the parkway. In fiscal year 1926 alone, however, more than 16,000 cubic yards of earth were moved to raise the roadway beside the creek. Another 3,200 cubic yards were trucked down from the zoo to grade the surrounding slopes. Steel trusses salvaged from the old Aqueduct Bridge were hauled to the site for use the following year in the construction of a narrow two-lane bridge crossing the creek below the open area south of Connecticut Avenue. This was one of bridges that incited the ire of the Commission of Fine Arts. When the bridge opened in May 1927, the Evening Star advised that it was only a temporary expedient destined to be replaced by a "permanent and artistic structure, in keeping with the surroundings," as soon as adequate funds became available. Stone-faced abutments attempted to meliorate the steel trusses' industrial look, but concern for aesthetics and safety replaced it with a wider stone-faced concrete structure in January 1938.[239]

Other work accomplished in 1926-27 included the completion of the 20' wide causeway under the Massachusetts Avenue embankment and construction of a new bridle path entrance on the west side of P Street. Fifty-seven rustic benches and thirty-six picnic tables were erected along the upper stretch of the parkway to establish picnic grounds and further encourage public use. Approximately 100,000 honeysuckle vines were planted to stabilize and beautify the "unsightly banks" between Pennsylvania Avenue and P Street. The park maintenance crew launched a major effort to clear brush and downed timber along the parkway, completing the area between Calvert Street and Massachusetts Avenue by mid 1926. In 1927 the Washington Evening Star reported that the brush-removal crew was gradually working its way south, "leaving order, beauty, and safety in their wake." The thick and tangled growth that had materialized over years of neglect was unattractive and undesirable from a forest management standpoint; it was also threatening to middle-class parkway users, as the dense brush provided a haven for tramps and other potential troublemakers. The paper pointed out that the parkway was to be used by "equestrians and hikers of both sexes and all ages" and advised that "every point in it should be as natural as possible, yet as open and safe as expert

---

[238] "Sherrill to Seek Boulevard Funds," Washington Herald, 30 October 1924; "Potomac Parkway Project Delayed," Washington Evening Star, 5 December 1924; "Filling Last Link in Long Parkway," Washington Evening Star, 27 February 1927; Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1931, 90; James M. Goode, The Outdoor Sculpture of Washington, D.C.: A Comprehensive Guide (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974), 391; Office of Public Buildings and Grounds/National Capital Parks photographs in the Washingtoniana Collection, Martin Luther King, Jr., Public Library.

[239] Annual Report of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1926, 18; Annual Report of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1926, 29; "Temporary Park Span Soon To Be Open" Washington Evening Star, 3 May 1927; "New Rock Creek Bridge is Begun: Traffic North of Massachusetts Avenue to Continue During Construction" Washington Evening Star, 26 January 26 1938.

knowledge and industry can make it." Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was supposed to be a carefree place to enjoy domesticated nature, not a foreboding urban wilderness.[240]

Low appropriations continued to hinder parkway construction and frustrate those responsible for its completion and maintenance. The first official appropriation for the development of the parkway was $54,490 allotted for the 1927 fiscal year. The next year's appropriation was $40,595. The 1929 appropriation of $43,000 was little better. The funding level for 1930 rose slightly to $62,000, but little could be accomplished with these meager appropriations. In a 1929 report prepared for the RC&PPC, engineer G. E. Clark complained that "it is obvious that with such a schedule the development of the project as a whole would go on indefinitely." Clark vainly called for $500,000 yearly appropriations for 1931-34, followed by a final payment of $334,800 in 1935. A 1930 attempt by Senator Tydings of Maryland to secure the more modest sum of $671,950 to complete the parkway also failed. Both Clark and Tydings used the increases in traffic volume expected to follow the completion of the Arlington Memorial Bridge to argue for rapid development of the parkway. If park values themselves provided insufficient impetus to loosen congressional purse strings, they reasoned, pragmatic traffic engineering arguments might supply the impetus for accelerated development.[241]

Restricted by the shortage of funds, parkway construction inched along in 1929-30. Construction of the road surface between Massachusetts Avenue and the zoo began in 1929, and that section of road was completed by the following June. Extensive grading, sodding, lawn-seeding, and honeysuckle planting accompanied the final construction, helping to blend the new roadway in with its surroundings. Curbs, gutters, post-and-rail fences, and light posts were installed so that at least part of the parkway would have a finished, park-like appearance, and thus serve as an example of the attractive landscape that increased funding would create along the entire length of the parkway. Grading and filling began between Massachusetts Avenue and P Street in 1929. The same year, the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds considered using the broad open area below P Street as a site for the city's "colored" golf course, noting that the site was one of two in the city "accessible to the greatest number of colored residents." The Anacostia site was eventually chosen because of the high cost of acquiring the necessary additional land near Rock Creek. Preliminary grading for the parkway between P Street and Pennsylvania Avenue began in 1930.[242]

The imminent completion of Arlington Memorial Bridge focused attention on the Potomac waterfront section of the parkway in 1930-31. A number of large elms were replanted from the east bridge-abutment area to line the course of the future parkway along the waterfront. The seawall was finally completed, allowing for the dumping of more than 21,000 cubic feet of clay fill to extend the riverfront out to the desired line. The foundation for the Titanic Memorial was constructed in March

---

[240] Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1926, 26; "Beneficial Bonfires," Washington Evening Star, 22 March 1927.

[241] Clark, "Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway: Revised Estimates . . .," 45; "Plans for Next Step in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway," Washington Evening Star, 29 June 1930.

[242] "Plans for Next Step in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway," Washington Evening Star, 29 June 1930; Annual Report of the Director of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1929, 37-41; Annual Report of the Director of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1930, 41-47.

1930 and the figure was set in place in April.[243] After the fill settled, the waterfront was attractively landscaped with trees, shrubs, grass, and flower beds. The roadway was graded, and curbs and gutters installed in time to allow work to begin on the actual road surface during summer 1931. By October, the roadway was completed from West Potomac Park to K Street. In mid October the long-standing legal difficulties with the C & O Canal Company were finally settled, allowing work to begin on the parkway bridge across Rock Creek near L Street. This structure was to be a steel-girder bridge 40' wide from curb to curb, with a pedestrian sidewalk on the upstream side and a bridle path on the lower. The bridge contract was awarded to W. C. Briddell Company of Baltimore for $41,790 with the stipulation that the project be completed by June 1933.[244]

While the major project of regrading the valley between Pennsylvania Avenue and P Street remained stalled by continued low appropriations, significant progress was made between Massachusetts Avenue and P Street in 1930-31. The basic grading was completed by February 1931. By the end of the year, curbs, gutters, and road base were in place and considerable paving and general landscaping accomplished. Olmsted's warnings about the dangers of moving the road to the east side of Rock Creek above the Q Street Bridge went unheeded. In fact, parkway builders decided to cross the creek below Q Street, necessitating an even longer cut into the steep bank on the east side of the valley. As Olmsted predicted, fitting the road on the east side of the creek required a substantial amount of grading and filling, which the builders attempted to stabilize with rock retaining walls. One retaining wall carried the road above Rock Creek, beginning south of the Dumbarton Bridge and ending several hundred feet to the north in a serpentine curl. A short rock wall on the east side of the parkway held back the steepest section of the bank just beyond the north end of the lower retaining wall. This solution proved inadequate, as a landslide in April 1935 confirmed Olmsted's fears. The landslide followed a period of heavy rain. Several thousand cubic yards of fill slumped down onto the parkway, totally obstructing the northbound lane and interfering with southbound traffic for almost two years.[245]

---

[243] This figure was removed in 1966 due to the construction of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. It was relocated to Waterfront Park (U.S. Reservation No. 717) on Washington Channel across from East Potomac Park (James M. Goode, The Outdoor Sculpture of Washington, 391).

[244] "Parkway Section to be Built Soon," Washington Evening Star, 27 February 1931; "Reach Agreement for Parkway Span Over Rock Creek," Washington Evening Star, 14 October 1931; Annual Report of the Director of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1930, 47; Annual Report of the Director of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1931, 68; Annual Report of the Director of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1932, 19, 33.

[245] This tongue of earth blocked the northbound lanes of the parkway for the next year-and-a-half. Subsequent smaller slides convinced the authorities to let the earth settle through the following winter. Funding delays, disagreements over the proper engineering solution, and an unwillingness to totally close that section of the parkway for major repairs delayed the beginning of work to remove the slide and build more substantial retaining walls until fall 1936. Repair work on the slide was not completed until January 1937. "Bank Cave-in Hurts Gardens, Blocks Street," Washington Post, 13 April 1935; "Park Landslide Funds Requested," Washington Evening Star, 8 July 1935; "New Park Bridge Will Open/Span North of P street to Admit Traffic Tomorrow Morning. Slide Still A Problem," Washington Evening Star, 3 June 1936; "Traffic Hazard to be Eliminated," Washington Post, 4 September 1936; "Parkway Opened to Motor Traffic," Washington Evening Star, 2 January 1937.

The Office of Public Building and Grounds/National Capital Parks photo collection documents the initial construction in the Q Street Bridge area, the landslide, and the subsequent major reconstruction of the roadway. (Annual Report of the Director of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1932, 33; "Parkway Section to be Built Soon," Washington Evening Star, 25 February 1931; "Rock Creek Course Diverted by Wall," Washington Post, 20 March 1931.

By April 1932 the parkway was completed from Connecticut Avenue to P Street and from K Street to West Potomac Park.[246] General landscaping work continued in these areas, with hundreds of deciduous and evergreen trees planted and thousands of honeysuckle vines placed for ground cover. Lawns and sod borders were also nurtured throughout the completed sections of the parkway. In 1934, private funds were used to erect a memorial on the parkway grounds to three-time Populist party candidate William Jennings Bryan. Located in the triangle formed hy Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and 26th Street, the Bryan Memorial consisted of an 8-1/2' tall bronze figure of the former Nebraska congressman, sculpted by Gutzon Borglum, standing with arm upraised on a simple pedestal on which was carved the key lines from the noted orator's famous "Cross of Gold" speech, "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns. You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold." Objections to the prominent display of this incendiary rhetoric, together with Bryan's controversial reputation, prompted Congress to stipulate that the statue could not be located on the Mall or within one-half mile of the Capital. The Bryan Memorial fomented no major revolutions, however. It remained in place until 1961, when Secretary of the Interior Morris Udall shipped it off on "permanent loan" to Bryan's birthplace in Salem, Illinois, as part of a general effort to thin the ranks of Washington's memorial statuary.[247]

The Waterside Drive overpass, with its police observation tower and rest rooms, was completed in June 1932 at a cost of $38,547.80. The chief remaining projects were the upper and lower P Street bridges, and restoration of the troublesome area between P Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, where extensive regrading work remained. Grant announced that major regrading below P Street would begin in the fall. District commissioners requested $182,000 for road work and $250,000 to replace the upper-level P Street Bridge, but received only $82,000 for general parkway construction and no appropriation for the much-needed bridges. The press supported the appropriations as necessary and long overdue, quoting Commission of Fine Arts executive secretary H. P. Caemmerer's reminder that "this is one of the great city planning projects and transforms an old ravine into a beautiful parkway." Grant publicly criticized Congress's poor funding record, but held out the promise that a temporary road could soon be opened from P Street to M Street, "if sufficient funds are on hand by next spring." Grant estimated that full completion of the parkway was still two or three years away.[248]

Continued frustration with meager congressional outlays prompted parkway officials to take a different approach in 1933, when they began seeking funds from federal public works programs in addition to the annual D.C. appropriations. Citing the "great amount of excavation work" yet to be done in the valley below P Street, park authorities sought Public Works Administration funding to push the parkway project through to completion. The strategy of completing the ends of the parkway

---

[246] Report of the Director of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1932, 19, 33.

[247] S.J. Resolution 127, 71st Cong., amended by S.J. Resolution 182, 72nd Cong., 1st Sess.; William Jennings Bryan Memorial Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives; Goode, The Outdoor Sculpture of Washington, D.C., 540.

[248] "Parkway Completion Held Halted by P Street Bridge," Washington Evening Star, 3 April 1932; "Plan on Excavating New Parkway," Washington Evening Star, 13 August 1932; "D.C. To Ask Funds for Parkway and Span at P Street," unidentified clipping, June 27 193(?), P Street Bridge Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, Record Group 66, National Archives; the Waterside Drive Overpass was built by the National Construction Company and is a reinforced concrete structure faced with stone cut from nearby Maryland quarries (Report of the Director of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1932, 19, 33).

first had been successful in terms of opening up the two most attractive sections to an appreciative public, but the lack of a connection between the two areas became increasingly embarrassing as construction continued to drag on, with no apparent end in sight. The glaring gap between the completed upper and lower parkway segments would seemingly have been an effective argument for rapid construction of the intervening section--especially as parkway officials began to stress the potential commuting benefits of the new roadway--but the parkway continued to come up short in the competition for District funds. Completion of the parkway bridge above L Street brought additional pressure to speed up the remaining construction, as the new bridge could not be used until the roadway between K and P streets was finished.[249]

The valley between these points was the scene of intensive excavations during 1933-34. Grading equipment, dump trucks, and crews from the Construction Works Administration armed with picks and shovels hacked away at the steep banks of fill on the west side of the valley. This massive effort continued throughout 1934 and into 1935. The earlier bridle path had followed the east side of Rock Creek, but the removal of hundreds of tons of ashes and other debris carved out enough room to fit both parkway and bridle path on the Georgetown side of the creek. The parkway's chronic funding woes were finally laid to rest when the National Park Service provided a major infusion of funds for parkway construction in July 1934. Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes allotted $165,000 for Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway out of funds authorized by the Hayden Act for road and trail construction in the National Parks. In addition, the District of Columbia offered to supply up to $100,000 toward the project from its $900,000 share of the Hayden Act's $200 million road construction fund. The District received an additional appropriation from federal funds for work on the upper-level P Street Bridge. The contract was awarded in September 1933 to Pecora, Gaskill Engineering and Contracting Company, and A. T. Carozza of Baltimore for $199,347.[250]

The press took these appropriations as a sign that completion was imminent, and began to sing the praises of the long-awaited parkway. Reporting the National Park Service allotment in July 1934, the Evening Star pronounced, "Long neglected as part of the Washington park system, the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway that lies between K and P streets will emerge as a beautiful and serviceable drive." The Washington Post asserted that completing the parkway would "give Washington one of the most unique public pleasure grounds in the world." The Post dwelt as much on the local park function of the parkway as on its role as a pleasure drive or commuter route. It cast the parkway as an urban oasis, extending the cool greenery and shady walks of Rock Creek Park into the heart of the city. Referring to the parkway as "this great natural garden," the paper rejoiced that, "in addition to the normal scattered retreats from the heat, noise, and commercial atmosphere, Washington will have a majestic continuous sweep of parkland bisecting the entire city." The Post's editorial hailed the nearly completed parkway as a triumph of enlightened and dedicated city planning, closing with the questionable assertion that

---

[249] "Tunnel Under Zoo is Studied as Potomac-Rock Creek Link," Washington Evening Star, 3 July 1933; "P Street Bridge Contract O.K.'D By District Heads, Washington Evening Star, 19 September 1933; "Rock Creek Drive Fund Hopes Grow/Completion of L Street Bridge Spurs Interest in Finishing Project," Washington Evening Star, 31 September 1933.

[250] The Hayden Act (P.L. 73-393, 48 stat. 993) provided $200 million in emergency road construction funds, $24 million of which was earmarked for road and trail construction on federal lands; "District Will Give $100,000 Toward Valley Road Link," Washington Evening Star, 15 July 1934; "Potomac Link to Rock Creek Park Assured/Ickes Allocates $165,000 for Thoroughfares Spanning District," Washington Post, 20 July 1934; "Rock Creek Valley Link and Potomac Tract Assured Place in National Capital Parks," Washington Evening Star, 22 July 1934.

many of those who relax in the varied environment thus made freely available will spare a thought of gratitude to that which has made it possible--the patience, the skill and the foresight of our city planners.[251]

Despite the Post's enthusiastic pronouncements, considerable work remained to be done. The grading and filling below P Street continued through spring and summer 1935. The roadway between K and P streets finally opened at the end of October with the help of an additional $80,000 in Public Works Administration funds. The long-delayed bridge carrying the parkway across Rock Creek above P Street remained the final obstacle to unobstructed passage from Rock Creek Park to the Potomac waterfront. Until this bridge was completed, parkway traffic was diverted out of the parkway and up the access roads, where it crossed P Street at grade level before descending to rejoin the parkway on the other side of the unfinished span. The low-level P Street Bridge opened at 7 a.m. on June 4, 1936. While a few improvements remained to made--notably the removal of the landslide, the rechanneling of Rock Creek at the P Street bend, and the construction of a bridge at Massachusetts Avenue to replace the unsafe and unsightly conduit-and-fill solution--it was now possible to drive all the way from Rock Creek Park to Virginia Avenue without leaving the parkway or confronting a traffic signal.[252]

Reception: From "Park" to "Way"

The press greeted the parkway's opening with considerable fanfare. As completion appeared imminent in mid 1935, the Post and the Evening Star printed numerous of articles summarizing the history of the project and singing the praises of the soon-to-be-completed parkway. A few reports celebrated the parkway's original function as an urban pleasure ground and scenic link between the city's two major parks. The role of parkways in the urban environment had changed drastically between 1900 and 1935, however. Beginning in the late 1920s, reports on the parkway increasingly commented on its value as a commuter artery destined to relieve downtown congestion and speed passage to the rapidly developing northwest suburbs. By the time the parkway opened, the commuting function dominated the language of press reports and official pronouncements. Increasingly, the terms "highway" and "traffic artery" replaced earlier characterizations such as "park-link" and "pleasure drive." In its coverage of the opening of the roadway between K and P streets in 1935, the Evening Star asserted, "The special value of the parkway is that it will afford an uninterrupted passage to the downtown area, or to Virginia, by avoiding the many intersections and traffic congestion that plague motorists on the regular street routes." Inaccurately conflating present utilitarian demands with more complex past desires, the Evening Star proclaimed, "When all this work is accomplished, the dream of the planners will be realized, a motor highway through Rock Creek Valley--all the way from the Lincoln Memorial to the East-West Highway in Montgomery

---

[251] "Rock Creek Valley Link and Potomac Tract Assured Place in National Capital Parks," Washington Evening Star, 22 July 1934; "Linking the Parks," Washington Post, 23 July 1934.

[252] "Road to Link The Potomac, Rock Creek Parks," Washington Post, 11 June 1935; "Road linking 2 D.C. Parks is Approved," Washington Post, 6 July 1935; "New Rock Creek Road Link to Open Artery," Washington Evening Star, 24 October 1935; "Parkway's New Thoroughfare to Be Thrown Open," Washington Evening Star, 29 September 1935; "New Park Bridge Will Open," Washington Evening Star 3 June 1936; "Rock Creek Drive is Opened," Washington Post, 4 June 1936.

County, Md." The original planners--who were landscape architects and architects, not planners in the mid twentieth-century sense--had never heard of "motor highways," of course, and gave little thought to the parkway's relationship to transportation issues in suburban Maryland; they had dreamed of converting an unsightly and unhealthy urban wasteland into a quiet linear park.[253]

The transition from "park" to "way" began as far back as the RC&PPC's 1916 report's reference to the creation of a "continuous drive" from the District line to Potomac Park, though at the time this drive was still cast as a recreational excursion. With the growing popularity of automobile commuting, however, the idea of an efficient route to the rapidly expanding northwest suburbs undoubtedly exerted more promotional appeal than the awkward and outdated concept of a "park-link." Grant and other parkway promoters increasingly emphasized this practical function in their annual pursuit of congressional funding. By 1927, Grant was vigorously promoting the parkway's commuting potential. In a speech to the Kaloroma Citizens' Association, he portrayed the future parkway as a vital commuter thoroughfare serving the northwest region of the city. Senator Tydings also emphasized the practical value of the parkway in his 1930 attempts to secure construction funds. An Evening Star article describing Tydings's efforts praised the still-novel parkway innovation of separating cross-traffic to improve traffic flow, and observed, "The completed Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway will provide an important traffic artery to the northward." A 1933 Evening Star article on the parkway proclaimed, "this new traffic artery will relieve downtown congestion to a remarkable degree." An account of the District's $100,000 allocation in 1934 reported that "the new highway will throw a great amount of traffic through Rock Creek Valley and relieve congestion on a great many streets." When the final bridge opened in 1936, the city's traffic director dispensed with homilies about the beauties of nature and declared, "This new driveway is going to be a wonderful outlet for Connecticut Avenue traffic all the way to Potomac Park. There are no grade crossings. It means a straight shot at the heart of the city."[254]

While most accounts emphasized the parkway's commuting potential, some commentators continued to describe the new road in terms that reflected the prewar parkway's twin traffic and pleasure-drive functions. A June 1935 Post article reiterated the parkway's original purpose, asserting:

> When the project is completed, Washington will have one of the most magnificent drives in the world, one which will permit a motorist to drive through two famous parks without once leaving their natural grandeur.[255]

The Post reiterated this theme in a series of parkway articles that emphasized the older, aesthetic and recreational functions of urban parkways. The newspaper advised that by connecting the

---

[253] "New Rock Creek Road Link to Open Artery," Washington Evening Star, 24 October 1935; "Parkway's New Thoroughfare to Be Thrown Open," Washington Evening Star, 29 September 1935.

[254] "Grant Discusses New Park Drive/Director Hails Boulevard as one of City's Main Traffic Channels," Washington Evening Star, 16 February 1927; "Plans for Next Step in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway," Washington Evening Star, 29 June 1930; "Tunnel Under Zoo is Studied as Potomac-Rock Creek Link," Washington Evening Star, 3 July 1933; "District Will Give $100,000 toward Valley Road Link," Washington Evening Star, 15 July 1934; "New Parkway to Rank With Finest," Washington Evening Star, 17 April 1936.

[255] "Road to Link The Potomac, Rock Creek Parks," Washington Post, 11 June 1935.

two major parks, the parkway would "afford a continuous horseback ride or automobile drive from the northern end of the city to the Potomac River." Parkway driving, the Post inferred, was not just a matter of getting from point A to point B as fast as possible. With a top speed limit of 22 mph throughout the upper valley, the new parkway would add to the collection of "cool and scenic drives for which the Capital is well known."[256] The Post repeated its previous year's accolades to the vision and perseverance of Washington's city planners and boasted, "When this road is complete Washington will probably have the longest continuous park drive in any American city. It will certainly have one of the most beautiful of municipal pleasure grounds." After reciting the splendors of Rock Creek and Potomac Park with all the effusiveness of nineteenth-century park advocates, the Post avowed that completion of the parkway ensured that, "more than ever, Washington will be entitled to the distinction of being 'a city of parks.'"[257]

The Evening Star echoed its rival's civic pride. As work on the P Street Bridge drew to a close, the newspaper declared, "When that little patch of pavement spanning the creek is completed, Washington will have one of the grandest automobile parkways in the world."[258] Trumpeting the parkway-builder's achievement while taking another swipe at Congress's penurious treatment of District improvements, the paper announced:

> Nowhere else in the world is there a drive of such length and beauty of scenery and natural attractiveness of surroundings. It has been worth the wait, though the time has been long and irksome.[259]

The Evening Star blithely integrated the concerns of twentieth-century commuters and nineteenth-century nature acolytes in a rhapsodic tribute to the parkway. The majority of parkway users might be on their way to work, but the newspaper contended that commuting on the new parkway would be not just a convenient escape from city traffic but a quasi-religious experience. "In less than a month," proclaimed the Evening Star:

> Southbound motorists from the Chevy Chase-Bethesda area will have the privilege of riding downtown through a veritable fairyland, a natural setting for nature's own worship, and not so much as a traffic light to impede progress. There is, perhaps, no city in the world offering so much beauty for those going to work.[260]

Along with this trivialization of the romantic concept of nature, the language of the Evening Star's pronouncements exemplified another significant departure from the parkway-designer's original intentions. The perceived terminus of the parkway began to shift northward in the 1920s. The

---

[256] The Washington Evening Star reported that Frederic A. Delano, chairman of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, decreed this speed "in order to keep the drive from becoming a mere traffic artery." ("Parkway's Speed Set at 22 Miles for Entire Route," Washington Evening Star, 21 June 1936).

[257] "Road Linking 2 D.C. Parks Is Approved," Washington Post, 7 July 1935; "The Missing Link," Washington Post, 8 July 1935.

[258] "New Parkway Here to Rank with Finest," Washington Evening Star, 17 April 1936.

[259] "The Connecting Parkway" Washington Evening Star, 6 July 1935.

[260] "New Parkway Here to Rank with Finest," Washington Evening Star, 17 April 1936.

original legislation made no mention of the Chevy Chase-Bethesda suburbs: it simply called for a linear park connecting Potomac Park and Rock Creek Park. In addition to casting the parkway as a "highway," "thoroughfare," or "traffic artery," commentators increasingly transferred the nominal northern end of the parkway from Rock Creek Park to the Maryland suburbs. By the 1930s, articles promoting the parkway rarely mentioned the earlier goal of connecting the two parks. After the completion of the section between P Street and Rock Creek Park in 1932, newspaper accounts routinely proclaimed East-West Highway to be the northern terminus of the parkway. In many accounts, the parkway's "park-link" function was forgotten, so that it simply became a road connecting other roads, with the end-points at East-West Highway and Arlington Memorial Bridge serving as junctures to other road networks. The newspapers hailed the new ability to drive from the District line, Bethesda, Chevy Chase, or "the East-West Highway in Montgomery, Md." to the Lincoln Memorial, or at least to the southernmost point of construction. A 1935 Washington Herald article referred to the parkway as the "Highway Link to Chevy Chase" and stated it was "long promised to Chevy Chase citizens to relieve traffic-jammed Wisconsin and Connecticut Avenues." When the opening of P Street Bridge completed the final link in the parkway in April 1936, the Evening Star's coverage followed District Traffic Director William Van Duzer's lead and repeatedly referred to the parkway as "the new Chevy Chase-Potomac Park driveway."[261]

The Evening Star's article on the completion of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway lauded the road-builder's achievement but raised several issues that would preoccupy and often exasperate parkway officials and various segments of the general public over the next several decades. The Evening Star quoted Van Duzer's warning that the new Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway might already be out-of-date. "The only thing I'm afraid of," Van Duzer warned, "is that it might be necessary to make this winding lane a one-way street in the afternoon." The paper also noted that there was "an odd limitation on the use of the new driveway." The road between the parkway and Rock Creek Park passed through the National Zoo. Since the zoo was only open during daylight hours, the prized link to the Maryland suburbs was severed at nightfall. In addition, the parkway entered the zoo via a ford rather than across a bridge, so that heavy rains regularly closed the highly touted "Chevy Chase-Potomac Driveway." Clearly, neither of these limitations were desirable from a traffic standpoint. The declaration of one-way rush-hour traffic in May 1937 fulfilled Van Duzer's prediction and offered a measure of relief from commuter congestion. The zoo issue was more complex. Almost thirty years would pass before park authorities, zoo officials, and traffic planners reached an agreement to provide round-the-clock through-traffic between the parkway and Rock Creek Park.[262]

---

[261] "Plan Excavating on New Parkway," Washington Evening Star, 13 July 1932; "Tunnel Under Zoo is Studied as Potomac-Rock Creek Link," Washington Evening Star, 3 July 1933; "Rock Creek Drive Fund Hopes Grow," Washington Evening Star, 31 September 1933; "Highway Link to Chevy Chase due by Jan. 1," Washington Herald, 13 July 1935; "New Parkway Here to Rank with Finest," Washington Evening Star, 17 April 1936.

[262] "New Parkway Here to Rank with Finest" ; "One-Way Traffic Hours Announced in Rock Creek Area," Washington Evening Star, 12 May 1937.

ALTERATIONS AND PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS TO ROCK CREEK AND POTOMAC PARKWAY AND ITS ENVIRONS, 1936-1992

Just as the rising popularity of the automobile forced numerous modifications to Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway's form and function during its extended design and development phases, the problem of balancing the frequently contradictory functions of "park" and "way" proved the most significant challenge for the agencies overseeing the parkway in the years following its completion in 1936. For the next thirty years, disputes over the proper course of development for Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and its connections to the north and south pitted various segments of the planning community against one another and provoked spirited public comment at both local and national levels.

The basic problem confronting parkway managers was the increase in commuter traffic caused by the rapid growth in automobile sales, the rising popularity of suburban living, and the concentration of government employment in the central city. The permanent and temporary office buildings constructed around the Mall, in particular, threatened to overload the parkway's carrying capacity and inundate the downtown area with parked cars. With much of the suburban growth occurring in northwest Washington and the adjacent Maryland suburbs, the completion of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway appeared to traffic planners--and to a considerable segment of the motoring public--to be the first step in the development of a fast and efficient commuter thoroughfare extending from the central city through Rock Creek valley to the Maryland suburbs. Some of the more ambitious transportation planners advocated extending this expressway beyond the immediate suburbs in order to link Washington with a national system of high-speed interstate highways. On the other side of the debate stood park advocates and many private landowners, who believed that the District park system should not be sacrificed for highway construction. This opposition was strongest among those whose property values or institutional fiefdoms were threatened by proposed highway improvements.

The difficulty of preserving the scenic integrity of Rock Creek valley while accommodating the needs of motorists was recognized as early as 1912, when the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park issued a detailed report on park maintenance activities. The report acknowledged that most existing park roads were too narrow for safe motoring, and noted that only a few heavily used sections had been macadamized. While the park road system had appeared adequate for future needs when it was constructed at the turn of the century, the unexpected increase in automobile traffic produced hazardous driving conditions, particularly at periods of peak use. The Board of Control advised against widening the principal driveways, however, recommending simply that Beach Drive and its outlets to the east and west of the park be macadamized. The report stated that the construction of additional automobile circuits might help relieve congestion, but warned, "The beauty of the park lies in its closeness to nature, and only such roads, bridle paths, and foot paths should be opened as are necessary to take care of traffic." Automobile use within the park was restricted to pleasure travel. Trucks and buses were prohibited, and the top speed was limited to 12 mph. Most of these recommendations were soon implemented, but the mere paving of roads was not enough to satisfy ever-increasing traffic demands.[263]

---

[263] Board of Control of Rock Creek Park, "Operations from Establishment of the Park, September 27, 1890 to June 30, 1912," Rock Creek Park Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, RG 66, National Archives.

While none of the early reports on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway directly addressed the automobile issue, in 1918 the Olmsted Brothers firm produced a report on Rock Creek Park that outlined general guidelines for park maintenance and dealt at length with the question of future alterations to the park road system.[264] Several generations of park managers have cited this report to justify their resistance to highway encroachments in Rock Creek Park and the contiguous parkways. The Olmsted report's fundamental premise, often quoted by subsequent park defenders, was:

> The dominant consideration, never to be subordinated to any other purpose in dealing with Rock Creek Park, is the permanent preservation of its wonderful natural beauty, and the making of that beauty accessible to people without spoiling it in the process.[265]

The Olmsted report stressed that the primary value of the park lay in the recreational opportunities provided by its large expanses of unbroken natural scenery. While acknowledging the need to provide access to the park's natural features, the report stressed that "roads, paths, and other accompaniments of intensive use must be so located and so built that the essential qualities of the Park are impaired to the least degree possible." Roads were tolerated as "a means to an end," which was to bring people into closer contact with nature. "If in the process they inflict injury on the scenery or distract attention from it by their own assertive qualities," the Olmsted report maintained, "by so much do they fail their primary purpose." Foreseeing the inevitable pressure to improve traffic flow through the park, the report approved the practice of one-way traffic patterns, but warned that the existing roads could not be widened "without unreasonably serious injury to those very landscape beauties for the appreciation of which the roads are primarily built."[266]

The Olmsted report was heartily endorsed by the Commission of Fine Arts, which urged the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds to adopt the document as a "bible" for park management. Writing for the commission, landscape architect John Greenleaf elaborated on the tension between access and preservation in an urban park like Rock Creek. Despite mounting pressures to construct utilitarian features within the park, Greenleaf emphasized that "a clear appreciation of its natural charm and a determination that it not be sacrificed" should remain the dominant impulse governing park management policies.[267]

Early twentieth-century statements on the development of park roads shared the assumption that motorists would behave in essentially the same manner as earlier park users, simply trading in their horses, bicycles, or walking shoes for a more convenient means of viewing park scenery. Thus the problems presented by the automobile seemed resolvable through minor improvements to roadways, reinforcement of bridges, straightening of sharp curves, and the creation of additional

---

[264] Olmsted Brothers, "Rock Creek Park," December 1918, report in Rock Creek Park Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, RG 66, National Archives; also available in U.S. Department of the Interior Library, Washington, D.C.

[265] Olmsted Brothers, "Rock Creek Park," forward.

[266] Olmsted Brothers, "Rock Creek Park," 34-35.

[267] Letter, Greenleaf to Ridley, Officer in Charge of Public Buildings and Grounds, 6 February 1919, Rock Creek Park Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, RG 66, National Archives.

circuits to spread automobilists more evenly through the park. As the previous section on the changing perception of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway has demonstrated, however, the function of park roads changed radically during the 1920s. Park roads were still viewed as means to an end, but when the park occupied a central location in a growing metropolis, the efficient flow of through-traffic rapidly took precedence over the leisurely contemplation of nature.

The inadequacy of Washington's existing street system had become apparent by the end of World War I. The huge influx of war workers created a rapid increase in the number of automobiles crowding the city streets, competing for parking spaces, and clogging the main roadways during peak commuting hours. In 1918 the local and national press reported that the city had become "a whirlpool of automobiles," and observed that outdated thoroughfares, insufficient regulations, and haphazard enforcement made Washington one of the most dangerous cities in the nation in terms of automobile accidents per capita.[268] The end of the war brought no respite. Automobile registration in the District of Columbia increased more than 100 percent between 1920 and 1924, and doubled again by the mid 1930s. Traffic-control improvements such as coordinated stoplights, one-way streets, street widening, and limitations on on-street parking proved insufficient to prevent this increase in traffic volume from causing unprecedented congestion. Since the most serious problems occurred during morning and evening rush hours, District traffic officials concluded that the best course of action was to "pipeline" commuter traffic around congestion points through the construction of limited-access highways leading from the suburbs to the center of town. Since most of the land in the District was already heavily built-up, it seemed obvious to traffic planners that the logical place to put these traffic arteries was in existing open spaces such as the stream valley parks conveniently radiating from the center of the District. With the land for Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway largely secured, its conversion into a commuter thoroughfare and eventual extension through Rock Creek Park to the northwest suburbs seemed a foregone conclusion to most traffic officials.[269]

The 1918 Olmsted report acknowledged the need for a limited number of major thoroughfares to convey city traffic laterally across the park, but it failed to predict the demand for an express route extending lengthwise through the park. A 1934 memo addressing changing conditions in Rock Creek Park called attention to the increased use of park roads by commuters, and correctly predicted that the completion of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway would put additional stress on the already overburdened road system. While changing traffic demands necessitated a re-evaluation of the park road system, the 1934 report expressed a preference for expediting the flow of traffic along existing roads rather than by sacrificing a large swath of park scenery to construct an entirely new expressway through the park. Minor road realignments were suggested to improve traffic flow, and new bridges were called for to replace the charming but obsolete fords along the main drive. These fords were to be preserved as "interesting landmarks," but the report acknowledged that modern traffic demands required uninterrupted passage through the park at all times. Despite this willingness to selectively upgrade the park road system, the report cautioned against the transformation of Rock Creek Park into a full-fledged commuter route. It asserted that "the automobile can be designated as one of the

---

[268] "Washington is a Whirlpool of Automobiles," Literary Digest 56, (March 2, 1918): 68-69.

[269] District of Columbia Department of Highways, "Twenty-four years of Progress in Highway Development, 1924-1948," (Department of Highways, Washington, D.C., 1948), 39-47. Another measure of the changing relationship between the park and the automobile was that in 1924, more than 60 percent of cars registered in the District were open touring models, which fostered a more immediate relationship with nature than the closed coupes that became the dominant automobile design in the 1930s.

greatest threats to the enjoyment of Rock Creek Park today," and optimistically confided, "It is very unlikely that any competent person selecting land for the construction of a modern roadway, adequate for the pleasure driving needs of an urban area, would regard Rock Creek Valley as preferable to other possibilities." As an alternative, the report suggested that Daniel Road and Broad Branch Road be improved to provide the requisite access to the Maryland suburbs.[270]

While park officials were determined not to let express thoroughfares destroy the serenity of Rock Creek Park, they conceded that Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was destined to function primarily as a commuter artery. In a 1934 report on the traffic problem in Rock Creek Park, National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (NCP&PC) landscape architect Thomas C. Jeffers stated, "The road in the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway section is designed for high speed traffic as far north as Cathedral Avenue. Its real purpose is to provide a pleasant and speedy way of travel from Potomac Park to Rock Creek Park." He contrasted this "high speed parkway" with the "winding, narrow roads of the park itself," and suggested that the section between Cathedral Avenue and Klingle Road be redesigned as a transitional zone with moderate curves and an intermediate speed limit. Any new construction above Piney Branch Road, Jeffers maintained, should only be undertaken under close supervision of park authorities and in accordance with the preservationist principles outlined in the 1918 Olmsted report.[271]

The phrase "high speed parkway" had a different meaning in the 1930s than it does today. After the tremendous effort involved in restoring the landscape of lower Rock Creek valley, park officials were not willing to consign Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway to mere expressway status. Upon the parkway's completion in June 1936, NCP&PC Chairman Frederic Delano determined that parkway speed limits should not exceed 22 mph. Delano contended that "driving in the park is intended as pleasure driving, and we do not want to encourage speeding just because there is an absence of grade crossings." Speed limits had been posted before the parkway officially opened, holding traffic to 30 mph from P Street south and further restricting it to 22 mph in the winding valley from P Street north to the zoo.[272] The Evening Star explained that Delano instituted the change "in order to keep the drive from becoming a mere traffic artery."[273] Delano privately defended the low speed limit as a means of protecting the parkway's squirrels and chipmunks, observing that the small mammal population of Central Park had suffered dramatically when its roads were opened to rush-hour traffic.[274]

---

[270] Malcolm Kirkpatrick, "What is Wrong with Rock Creek Park," report ca. June 1934, in Rock Creek Park Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, RG 66, National Archives.

[271] "Further Development of Rock Creek Park from Taft Bridge to and Including Piney Branch Parkway," report by Thomas C. Jeffers, Landscape Architect, NCP&PC meeting 16 February 1934, National Capital Parks and Planning Commission Parks and Reservations Planning Files, RG 328, National Archives.

[272] Letter, Caemmerer to Delano, 8 June 1936, National Capital Parks-National Capital Region Roads File, RG 79, National Archives.

[273] "Parkway's Speed Set at 22 Miles for Entire Route/Reduction Between K and Constitution Makes Limit Uniform," Washington Evening Star, 21 June 1936.

[274] Letter, Delano to Caemmerer, 6 June 1936, National Capital Parks-National Capital Region Roads File, RG 79, National Archives.

Early Revisions

While Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway's carefully landscaped course was undeniably more than "a mere traffic artery," the onslaught of commuter traffic that followed the opening of the lower-level P Street Bridge prompted parkway officials to initiate a number of measures to improve traffic flow through the heavily used corridor. The institution of one-way rush-hour traffic eased congestion problems markedly, but the need for actual physical alterations to the parkway rapidly became apparent. Several of these changes markedly transformed the parkway landscape in the years immediately following its official opening.

Even before the parkway was completed, its intersection with K Street proved to be a major source of congestion. The prohibition of left-hand turns at this point improved the situation significantly, but the added volume of traffic from the completed parkway threatened to cause intolerable delays. Various suggestions for an improved intersection were developed as early as June 1935. In June 1938 the Commission of Fine Arts approved plans to ease congestion by constructing an overpass for K Street that would eventually be integrated with the planned elevated highway extending through Georgetown to Key Bridge. The existing K Street Bridge was removed in 1939, and a new structure, designed by the District Highway Department under the supervision of architect Louis Justement and the engineering firm of Harrington and Cortelyou, was completed in 1941. World War II delayed construction of the elevated highway portion of the structure. This was completed in 1949, by which time the highway had been designated the Whitehurst Freeway to commemorate the contributions of Herbert C. Whitehurst, a long-time director of the District Highway Department.

The K Street overpass consists of a multiple-arched rigid concrete frame faced with gneiss. While more rustic than the neighboring freeway ramps added later in anticipation of even more extensive highway construction, the overpass's low, hulking form bears little relation to the graceful arches that cross the parkway farther up Rock Creek valley. Together with the attached segments of the Whitehurst Freeway and the accompanying exit and entrance ramps, this sprawling intersection obliterated an idyllic stretch of creek bed and surrounding greenery that had only recently been reclaimed from industrial degradation during the initial construction of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The fate of this area represented a major sacrifice of park values for the sake of improved transportation. Little concern was expressed over this trade-off at the time, however. The industrial nature of the parkway's immediate surroundings in this region may have persuaded parkway officials that the battle against highway encroachments was better fought elsewhere. In addition, the neighboring residential areas were generally poor and/or African American and thus lacked the political clout that helped citizens of northwest Washington and Chevy Chase combat the threat of similar highway construction in northern sections of the park and parkway.[275]

The current Massachusetts Avenue Bridge is a contemporary of the K Street overpass. It was also justified as a means of improving traffic conditions on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Parkway officials had long viewed the earthen embankment carrying Massachusetts Avenue across Rock Creek valley as an unsightly encumbrance to the parkway landscape. Recognizing that aesthetic

---

[275] Memo, Finnan to Hillory Tolson, 6 June 1935, National Capital Parks-National Capital Region Roads File, RG 79, National Archives; K Street Bridge Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, RG 66, National Archives.

arguments were unlikely to hold sway with Congress or the District Highway Department, they called attention to the traffic hazards presented by this arrangement as soon as the parkway opened between P Street and the zoo in January 1929. Entering the tunnel from the parkway drive required a dangerous blind turn into the dark culvert. Stop signs were erected at either end of the tunnel, and motorists were warned to proceed cautiously through the narrow passageway, which was also subject to flooding in periods of high water. Completion of the parkway underscored the unsatisfactory nature of this arrangement, as the congestion resulting from squeezing four lanes of traffic into two drastically impaired the parkway's carrying capacity. After briefly considering plans to expand the existing culvert to accept four or even six lanes of traffic, Congress finally appropriated funds to replace the embankment with a handsome stone-faced, single-arched structure that could accommodate the four-lane road with room to spare for bridle and foot paths. Engineered by Harrington and Cortelyou with the help of architect Louis Justement, the bridge design underwent several revisions before approval by the Commission of Fine Arts in September 1939. A strike against the Smoot Sand and Gravel Company delayed construction during summer 1940, but the new bridge opened to the public in April 1941. In April 1949 the span was officially named the Charles C. Glover Bridge, after the influential advocate and benefactor of District parks.[276]

Eliminating this bottleneck had the unintended effect of encouraging the District's Traffic Advisory Council to recommend the institution of express bus service along Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The NCP&PC ruled unanimously against this proposal as "contrary to all policies governing the use of parkways throughout the country." The widespread practice of prohibiting trucks and buses from scenic parkways has been cited as an example of the inherent class-bias of parkway promoters, but parkway officials believed they were protecting the park experience by excluding large commercial vehicles.[277] In addition to their basic aesthetic opposition to permitting buses on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, the NCP&PC asserted that the idea was both unsafe and impractical, since the roadway was only built to withstand the weight of passenger vehicles, and the parkway's curves were too sharp for buses to operate without endangering other traffic.[278]

The increasing pressure to upgrade the road system through Rock Creek valley prompted Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes to admit "Rock Creek and Potomac Parkways [*sic*] have become main traffic arteries, so that their preservation for park use and enjoyment is becoming increasingly difficult." To prevent this situation from getting any worse, Ickes proclaimed that Washington's rapid growth called for an increase in the area devoted to parks and parkways, rather

---

[276] "Rock Creek Road Opened To Public; Potomac Parkway Route Is Believed Still Perilous at Underpass," Washington Evening Star, January 1929; "Hazen Tells Rock Creek Road Plan," Washington Evening Star, 15 June 1936; "Massachusetts Avenue Bridge Ending 'Bottleneck' Planned," Washington Evening Star, 19 March 1939; "Strike Halts Work on New Bridge," Washington Post, 9 July 1940; "Ceremonies Renaming Span as Glover Bridge Set for Wednesday," Washington Evening Star, 24 April 1949; M Street Bridge Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, RG 66, National Archives; NPS-NCR Roads file, RG 79, National Archives.

[277] Patton and other writers have emphasized the elitist implications of the anti-bus sentiments of 1930s parkway builders, though the prohibition of commercial vehicles dated back to nineteenth-century park regulations prohibiting commercial vehicles (Patton, Open Road, 70). As the physical form of parkways and expressways grew increasingly indistinguishable in the 1940s, the ban on commercial traffic remained one of the few distinguishing features between all-purpose highways and parkways built ostensibly for pleasure travel.

[278] Minutes of the 166th meeting of NCP&PC, 13-14 November 1941, NCP&PC Parks and Reservations Planning File, NCP&PC Records, RG 328, National Archives. Anyone who has driven beside or behind one of the large commercial tour buses permitted on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway in the 1990s is likely to share the anti-bus sentiments of the parkway builders, for reasons of safety and comfort as well as aesthetics.

than the continued sacrifices demanded by transportation planners. "At the rate we are going," he complained, "the parks of Washington will soon be nothing but glorified boulevards. There will be no problem of playgrounds and recreation areas but only of traffic arteries, overpasses, underpasses, cloverleafs, automobile parking lots and sites for schools and office buildings."[279]

The Zoo Tunnel

Despite Ickes's objections, District transportation officials continued their efforts to increase the flow of traffic through Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and Rock Creek Park. The first major obstacle–though ultimately one of the last issues to be settled--was the creation of a permanent, all-weather connection between the north end of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and Beach Drive in Rock Creek Park. Until the current tunnel was completed in 1966, parkway traffic entered the zoo grounds through a ford located several hundred yards west of the current bridge. Traffic then followed the zoo roads across another ford before joining Beach Drive on the north side of the zoo. Since the zoo grounds were only open during daylight hours, and the fords were impassable during high water, motorists were often forced to take a roundabout route through surface streets to get from Beach Drive to Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The intersection of Beach Drive and the zoo entrance road at Harvard Street frequently created major traffic delays, even in good weather. District transportation engineers viewed the situation as an intolerable obstacle to efficient traffic planning, but zoo officials fiercely guarded their territory, fighting numerous delaying actions to prevent the highway from invading their domain.

The completion of the northern section of the parkway in 1929 prompted the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks to begin considering several approaches for establishing a direct connection with the roads in Rock Creek Park. One plan called for improving the existing road through the zoo along the east side of Rock Creek. This proposal was tentatively approved by Lt. Col. Sherrill, but the alternative of shifting the creek to the east and constructing a road bed on the west side--where it could be segregated from the main zoo grounds–appeared to offer a more promising solution. The possibility of tunneling under the zoo was offered as a last resort, though concerns were raised about the expense of this alternative.[280]

Zoo officials resisted all of these proposals, but the steady increase in traffic though the grounds created growing problems for both zoo managers and motorists. The zoo road was rapidly deteriorating, the steady stream of commuter vehicles upset the animals, and motorists were becoming increasingly irritated with the night-time closures, traffic tie-ups, and unpredictable detours. A 1933 editorial in the Washington Evening Star praised Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway as a "lovely and extremely useful highway," but called for rapid resolution of the zoo impasse. In a lengthy tongue-

---

[279] "Warning Against Further Encroachment upon the Parks and Playgrounds of the National Capital," Statement of Hon. Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, at 165th meeting of NCP&PC, 16-17 October 1941, NCP&PC Parks and Reservations Planning File, NCP&PC Records, RG 328, National Archives.

[280] Letter, Charles Moore to Dr. W. M. Mann, Superintendent, National Zoological Park, 14 March 1929, National Zoological Society Project File, Commission of Fine Arts Records, RG 66, National Archives; "Rock Creek Bridge Projects Studied," Sunday Star, 17 February 1929; "Tunnel Under Zoo is Studied as Potomac-Rock Creek Link/Officials, however, Believe Construction of Road on Eastern Border would be Less Expensive," Washington Evening Star, 3 July 1933; "New Rock Creek Road Link to Open Artery/East Bank Zoo Sector is Advocated to Speed Through Traffic," Washington Evening Star, October 1934.

in-cheek editorial, the Evening Star complained that zoo animals were receiving better treatment than city taxpayers, who were routinely uprooted and otherwise inconvenienced in the name of highway improvement.[281]

Negotiations continued throughout the 1930s, with District highway experts leaning increasingly toward the tunnel option and zoo officials refusing to give ground for either alternative. Dissuaded by the million-dollar price tag of the initial tunnel proposal, which followed the existing route along the creek, the Department of the Interior proposed a shorter and less expensive configuration that would run directly though the hill underneath the zoo administration building. Occupying essentially the same path as the present tunnel, the cost for the revised project was estimated at $665,000, which included $100,000 for a new bridge to carry the parkway over Rock Creek. By October 1939, estimates for the cost of the shorter tunnel had risen to $1.15 million with the inclusion of provisions for a grade separation at Harvard Street and a second tunnel to carry the parkway extension through the bluff below Adams Mill Road. Acting Secretary of the Interior E. K. Burlew suggested that the two tunnel proposals be included in an upcoming Bureau of Public Roads study of Rock Creek Park, and recommended that the connection be completed as soon as possible. The NCP&PC, which had vetoed the original tunnel proposal at an earlier meeting, voiced support for the shorter tunnel scheme in October 1942.[282]

World War II put a halt to the tunnel plans and created a backlog of projects that received higher priority in the immediate postwar years. By the early 1950s, traffic planners were once again pressing for a permanent, high-volume connection between Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and Beach Drive. Budgetary constraints frustrated an attempt to revive the tunnel project in 1951. The NPS allocated $265,000 to build the tunnel in 1953, but the money was spent elsewhere when zoo officials again refused to grant permission for the project. A new, expanded tunnel plan was readied in 1954 and reluctantly approved by both the NPS and the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), who were concerned that it would be seen as the first leg in the extension of an expanded Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway up through the park. The new plan called for a pair of two-lane tunnels running through the hill beneath the zoo office. When this plan was presented to zoo officials

---

[281] "Rock Creek Drive Fund Hopes Grow/Completion of L street Bridge Spurs Interest in Finishing Project," Washington Evening Star September 31, 1933; "Rock Creek-Potomac Drive," Washington Evening Star, 19 July 1935.

"The Happy Animals" appeared in the Washington Evening Star on 7 July 1933. It provides a revealing glimpse of nascent resistance to large-scale highway improvements, a response that would gain increasing prominence in the postwar years.

> Now it is obvious that nothing should be done to disturb the slumbers of the animals at the Zoo. But suppose the Zoo animals were mere taxpayers and property holders? What would be the procedure then? A tunnel? A new thoroughfare around the property? Nonsense! Piffle! The Zoo road would be widened and paved with concrete. A once quiet, winding roadway would be turned into a traffic boulevard. The night would be made hideous by headlights, horns, gears, motors, and possibly petting parties on the lawn of the head citizen--the lion. And the taxpayers would be assessed for 'improvement' of the highway, not only the taxpayers who owned property adjoining the highway, but those who owned property half a dozen blocks away. . . . The antelope, the zebra and the kangaroo may think they have a tough time of it. But they can thank their stars that somebody treats them like human beings, guards their interests and protects their sleep. Suppose they were mere taxpayers?

[282] Memorandum, Arthur Demaray to E. K. Burlew, Administrative Assistant, Department of the Interior, 6 March 1937, NCP&PC Parks and Reservations Planning File, RG 328, National Archives; Letter, Demaray to Burlew, 21 October 1939, NPS-NCR Roads file, RG 79, National Archives; letter, Acting Secretary of the Interior Burlew to Melvin Hazen, President, D.C. Board of Commissioners, 12 December 1939, NPS-NCR Roads file, RG 79, National Archives; Minutes of NCP&PC meeting, 15-16 October 1942, NCP&PC Parks and Reservations Planning File, RG 328, National Archives; "Rock Creek Park Traffic Remedies to be Sought," Washington Evening Star, 2 March 1941.

in 1957, they objected once again, arguing that "an arterial road cutting through this property would seriously interfere with the basic recreational and scientific functions of the Zoological Park."[283]

NPS Director Conrad Wirth reminded zoo officials that the enabling legislation for Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway specifically stipulated that the parkway was to connect with Rock Creek Park, but the Smithsonian Institution, which controlled the zoo property, threatened to tie up matters with further legal and bureaucratic maneuvering. Realizing that the process could drag on indefinitely, the NPS offered to include zoo officials in the planning process, and promised to build a large new parking lot for zoo visitors, construct a fence to screen the parkway from the zoo, and provide a new connection to the zoo from Harvard Street. In 1960 the Smithsonian finally acquiesced to a modified proposal calling for the construction of one 750' two-lane tunnel similar in design to the one originally proposed in the late 1930s. The Smithsonian agreed to transfer a strip of land between the north tunnel portal and Beach Drive to NPS, but Rock Creek Park officials maintain the transfer had not been officially completed as of 1992.[284]

The Evening Star greeted the announcement of the tunnel agreement with skeptical praise, warning readers of earlier unfulfilled promises to solve the zoo traffic problem. The Evening Star expressed its hope that the omitted second tunnel would eventually be built to carry all four lanes of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway into the park, but hailed any improvement as a long-overdue boon to commuters. "In a few years," the newspaper predicted, "if all goes well, the quiet beauty of Rock Creek Park will give thousands of us new-found enjoyment on the trip outward from the city."[285]

While the newspapers focused on the commuting potential of the proposed connection, park management preferred to downplay this aspect. The Washington Post reported, "Park officials conceded this link, like new sections of Beach Drive, north of the zoo, will help commuters. But they said its main purpose is to serve visitors to the Park and the Zoo." The Post stated that the bridle path through the zoo would be relocated so that it, too, could be used at all times, and that the "two quaint fords" might be retained for use by zoo visitors. A contract was signed with A. S. Wilkerstrom of Skaneateles, New York, in June 1962, to construct the tunnel at a cost of $1,536,584. The tunnel, connecting roads, and bridge across Rock Creek north of Calvert Street opened in fall 1966. The lower ford between the parkway and the zoo was abandoned and the roadway leading to it from the parkway closed. Inspection of the old ford in 1992 showed it to be severely deteriorated. Volunteer tree growth completely obstructed the old roadway leading from the ford to the present parkway drive.[286]

---

[283] "Economy Eliminates Parkway Extension to 16th St. Through Zoo," Washington Evening Star, 17 October 17; "New Tunnel to Extend Parkway Through Zoo," Washington Evening Star, 14 April 1960; Letter, Leonard Carmichael to Conrad L. Wirth, 25 February 1957, Zoo Bypass File, RC&PP, NCR-NPS Records, WNRC (quoted in Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park, 83).

[284] Letter, Wirth to Carmichael, 1 May 1957; letter, Carmichael to Wirth, 3 May 1957; letter, Wirth to Carmichael, 13 March 1959; letter Carmichael to Wirth, 7 August 1959; letter, Carmichael to Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton, 15 March 1959; Zoo Bypass File, RC&PP, NCR-NPS Records (quoted in Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park, 84); interview with Rock Creek Park Assistant Superintendent Michael Brown, 12 August 1992.

[285] "No Fooling," Washington Evening Star, 18 April 1960.

[286] "New Rock Creek Parkway Link to Include Tunnel Through Zoo," Washington Post, 15 April 1960; Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park, 84.

Parkway or Expressway?

The zoo tunnel was just one of several projects that District highway officials called for to enhance the flow of traffic between downtown and the northwest suburbs. Declaring that the increase in traffic caused by the proposed tunnel would rapidly overburden the antiquated park road system, Commissioner Melvin C. Hazen advanced a plan in 1938 to build a four-lane expressway through Rock Creek Park as far as the District line. Hazen's initial proposal located the new highway directly along Rock Creek. Given the widely expressed support for the newly completed parkway in the lower valley, the idea of extending its streamside configuration through the park must have seemed a logical progression. The prospect of cramming four lanes of traffic along the picturesque, meandering stream north of the zoo struck most observers as a vastly different proposition, however. Hazen's proposal was roundly condemned by park officials and by the Washington press. The Evening Star acknowledged that an expressway from K Street to the East-West Highway might make sense "from the standpoint of traffic engineering," but contended that it was "about the worst thing that could happen to Rock Creek Park." Praising Rock Creek Park as "a haven for those who seek refuge in the heart of nature from the rush, the bustle and confusion of modern life," the paper asserted that the traffic problem should be solved "without turning beautiful Rock Creek Valley into a roaring boulevard, shrouded in the haze of exhaust vapors."[287]

Temporarily chastened, the District Highway Department submitted a revised plan that spared most of the creek bottom scenery by relocating the highway through the densely wooded area on the western side of the park in the vicinity of Broad Branch. After passing through the hilly terrain east of Broad Branch, the expressway would join Oregon Avenue, which would be widened to create a speedy, four-lane thoroughfare running along the western edge of the park as far north as East-West Highway. While less destructive than Hazen's initial proposal, this scheme also required a significant sacrifice of park land, prompting a series of negotiations between the District Commissioners, the NPS, the NCP&PC, the Public Roads Administration, and the Smithsonian, along with frantic correspondence from expressway adversaries to the aging Olmsted attempting to enlist his opposition to the proposed destruction of park scenery.[288]

Throughout 1941-42 the NCP&PC raised a number of objections to the highway proposal, criticizing it on both practical and philosophical grounds. Commission members U. S. Grant III and John Nolen, Jr., argued that Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was already overloaded with commuter traffic and warned that the additional traffic generated by the parkway extension would create bottlenecks that would throw the entire District traffic system out of balance. Regardless of its effect on park values, Grant asserted, the proposed roadway was thus "bad planning" from a purely practical point of view. The noted city planner Harland Bartholomew appeared before the commission to advise against the project. "One of such express highways was built through [a] St. Louis park," he observed, "and we have come to think if we had it to do over again, we would not put it in that location." Bartholomew asserted that building commuter thoroughfares through parks was a self-defeating proposition. While locating limited-access expressways in stream valley parks had initially seemed to be offer an ideal solution to urban traffic congestion, such roads had only

---

[287] "Spare the Park," Washington Evening Star, 28 June 1938.

[288] "Rock Creek Park Traffic Remedies to be Sought," Washington Evening Star, 2 March 1941.

accelerated the trend toward automobile commuting. The additional traffic soon overloaded the new roadways, creating even greater pressure to sacrifice remaining parkland for even larger highways, which in turn inevitably became clogged by the ever-increasing stream of commuter vehicles. Bartholomew strongly urged District highway planners to reconsider the long-range merit of their proposal, which he summed up as "a very undesirable thing to do through Rock Creek Park."[289]

The most impassioned denouncement of the proposed parkway extension appeared in a September 1942 letter from planner Henry V. Hubbard to Olmsted, in which the NCP&PC member implored the senior landscape architect to come to Washington and make a personal statement against the highway. Hubbard implicitly likened the highway department's designs on the District park system to the expansionist policies of Nazi Germany. He declared that park allies could not meekly stand by and condone the sacrifice of parkland in the futile hope of satisfying the highway engineers' territorial ambitions. Hubbard urged the commission to respond decisively to the highway department's attempted incursion, asserting that the "'Appeasement' of the forces destructive of recreation spaces has had no effect other than to encourage further aggression." Contending that the real problem was not inadequate roadways but the government's misguided policy of concentrating federal employment in downtown Washington, Hubbard pointed out that, until federal office buildings were more widely dispersed, "There will be no limit to the encroachment upon the parks and recreation facilities in the interest of greater and speedier access to the heart of town." While the temporary office buildings on the Mall could be removed once the national emergency passed, Hubbard warned, "The provision of speedways through parks, however, is not temporary. Once the speedway is in, the park is gone."[290]

NCP&PC landscape architect Thomas C. Jeffers supported Hubbard's position, restating his objections to extending the "express thoroughfare" character of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway through Rock Creek Park in his 1934 report "Further Development of Rock Creek Park from Taft Bridge to and Including Piney Branch Parkway." Jeffers's report rooted its objections to the expressway in the 1918 Olmsted report's assertion that scenic preservation should be the "dominant consideration" in the evaluation of park improvements. Jeffers stressed the continued wisdom of this advice, and warned that the NCP&PC needed to act quickly, because the District Highway Department was about to start surveying the new expressway route through the park.[291]

While park authorities were vehemently opposed to further road development in Rock Creek Park, Olmsted had developed a more conciliatory approach toward highway proponents by this time. In his reply to Hubbard, Olmsted characterized the extension of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway through Rock Creek Park as not only inevitable, but "eminently reasonable as a matter of general city planning." Olmsted qualified his support for an extended "Rock Creek Parkway" with several provisos: the parkway extension must be carefully designed to minimally affect the park landscape, a

---

[289] Minutes of the 176th meeting of NCP&PC, 17-18 September 1942; Minutes of 177th meeting of the NCP&PC, 15-16 October, 1942; NCP&PC Parks and Reservations Planning File, RG 328, National Archives.

[290] Letter, Hubbard to F.L. Olmsted, 31 September 1942, NCP&PC Parks and Reservations Planning File, RG 328, National Archives.

[291] Letter, Jeffers to Henry V. Hubbard, 29 July 1942, NCP&PC Parks and Reservations Planning File, RG 328, National Archives; "Further Development of Rock Creek Park from Taft Bridge to and Including Piney Branch Parkway," report by Thomas C. Jeffers, approved at NCP&PC meeting 16 February 1934, NCP&PC Parks and Reservations Planning File, RG 328, National Archives.

continuation of the route into the Maryland suburbs must be provided in order to prevent further traffic congestion, and the increase in traffic from the new thoroughfare must not overburden the existing roadway below the zoo. Olmsted acknowledged that the highway department's proposal was deficient in all these areas, but he argued that it was better to cooperate with District officials and develop a well-designed parkway extension, "rather than take an obstructionist stance, with every possibility that an unwise express route would be 'bulled through' in a rush regardless of park values." Olmsted accepted the traffic engineers' contention that better provisions for through-traffic were "ultimately desirable," but suggested that the NCP&PC "fight for time" by agreeing to conduct a joint study of alternate routes and landscape treatments. Olmsted's response reflected his firm belief in the ability of landscape architects to solve the complex problems of modern urban development. It may also have stemmed in part from economic self-interest, since his firm could well expect to be involved as consultants in any such study of comprehensive park planning.[292]

Following Olmsted's advice, acting NPS Director Arthur Demaray wrote a conciliatory letter to District Engineer Commissioner Col. C. W. Kutz before the next NCP&PC meeting, urging that the agencies work together to devise a master plan for the development of roads and bridges in Rock Creek Park. Demaray suggested that the NCP&PC make a preliminary general plan, after which the Public Roads Administration would develop detailed engineering studies. This arrangement would allow the NCP&PC to ensure that the Olmsted report's "dominant consideration" policy remained in effect. In particular, Demaray asserted, there could be no new roads in the valley floor along Rock Creek or on the steep hillsides above the zoo. After the NCP&PC held further discussions on the road matter, Demaray sent Kutz another letter containing more detailed guidelines for the improvement of the road system in Rock Creek Park. These included numerous specific suggestions about the zoo tunnel and potential cross-park bridges. Kutz and his cohorts in the Public Roads Administration immediately complained that the new guidelines were too restrictive. World War II temporarily sidetracked the negotiations, but the debate continued throughout the 1940s, with the NCP&PC provisionally agreeing to an extension of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway through the zoo tunnel as far north as Blagden Avenue, but strongly opposing the proposed connection to Oregon Avenue. The NCP&PC preferred that northbound traffic be directed along Colorado Avenue to 16th Street, and recommended widening 16th Street to serve as the major northwest commuter thoroughfare. The District Highway Department, meanwhile, produced its Highway Improvement Plan of 1944, which called for the transformation of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway into a major northwest expressway.[293]

After the war, the District Highway Department and the Board of Commissioners renewed their efforts to expedite traffic flow throughout Metropolitan Washington. The first major postwar transportation study, prepared by the engineering firms J. E. Greiner Company and De Leuw, Cather and Company for the D.C. Board of Commissioners in 1946, called for a series of three circumferential beltways interconnected by a system of high-speed radial expressways. The 1946 Transportation Plan for Washington asserted that such "modern roadways" were essential to the well-

---

[292] Letter, Olmsted to Hubbard, 5 August 1942, NCP&PC Parks and Reservations Planning File, RG 328, National Archives.

[293] Letter Demaray to Kutz, 15 September 1942; letter, Demaray to Kutz, 28 October 1942; memo, "Principles for the Preservation of Rock Creek Park and the National Zoological Park"; minutes of the 178th meeting NCP&PC, 19-20 November 1942; minutes of the 224th meeting of NCP&PC, 23 January 1947; minutes of the 234th meeting of the NCP&PC, 29-30 January 1948; NCP&PC Parks and Reservations Planning File, RG 328, National Archives; for more on the District's 1944 highway plan, see Gutheim, Worthy of the Nation, 239.

being of every urban dweller, not only to improve traffic circulation but to rehabilitate slum areas and breathe new life into downtown areas, which were supposedly suffering from the lack of vehicular access. Employing the mixed biological metaphors favored by many urban planners, the report warned that failure to build such a comprehensive system of modern roadways would allow "creeping paralysis to engulf the city's traffic arteries." Failure to strengthen this vital circulation system would cause the city to become "flabby and dissipated." The report praised the newly completed Shirley Memorial Highway in Arlington, Virginia, as a model for the design of efficiently engineered modern expressways. Grand Central Parkway in New York City, the Outer Drive in Chicago, and the Arroyo Seco Parkway in Los Angeles were also cited as models for Washington's expressway system. The slow, inefficient, prewar parkways may have satisfied an earlier generation's penchant for leisurely Sunday driving but, according to the traffic engineers, modern drivers wanted modern, scientifically designed express highways. "Expressways," the report declared, "are an engineering answer to the public's desire to make travel Facile, Fast, and Foolproof." Unlike the prewar parkway promoters, these postwar highway engineers expressed little concern for the aesthetic or recreational aspects of motorways, describing the new roads simply as "channels for the uninterrupted movement of vehicles."[294]

The 1946 transportation plan portrayed Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and its proposed extension through Rock Creek Park as vital components of the new highway system, claiming that with several key improvements, the expanded roadway could carry a major portion of the city's northbound traffic. The expanded parkway would serve as a major radial thoroughfare, tunnelling through the zoo, following the controversial route through the west side of the park, and connecting with the planned extension of U.S. Route 240 in Maryland. According to the consulting engineers, these improvements could be done "without seriously detracting from the natural beauty of Rock Creek Park." In fact, traffic experts contended that extending the parkway to the District line would result in a net increase in public appreciation of Rock Creek Park. The report asserted, "Enjoyment of that beauty by the additional hundreds of thousands of motorists who would thus be accommodated each year would more than compensate for any small loss in landscaped area." While the NCP&PC continued to oppose the creation of new roadways within Rock Creek Park, it was sympathetic with the Greiner-De Leuw report's basic conclusion that the District highway system needed major improvement.[295]

While the consulting engineers' studies called for only minor improvements to Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway's existing design, the District Highway Department's own report sounded a more ominous note. In keeping with the postwar predilection for massive urban redevelopment

---

[294] J. E. Greiner Company and De Leuw, Cather & Company, Transportation Plans for Washington (prepared for Board of Commissioners, District of Columbia, 1946), 1-12, 17. Cities have long been compared to the human body, but postwar planners scaled new heights of metaphorical excess, producing statements like the following suggestion that clogged traffic arteries would lead to community "strokes."

> Wherever the street pattern constitutes a constriction on the traffic artery, the pressure of regional traffic added to local traffic creates the clot of parking problems and the thrombus of stalled traffic. The resultant damage to the tissue of the community is predictable. At best there will be an impairment of the social and community function and, at worst, a complete paralysis of community life.
>
> (Charles Glover, "The Challenge of the New Highway Program," in W. Brewster Snow, ed., The Highway and the Landscape (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1959): 56-73; 65.

[295] Transportation Plans for Washington, 24, 29, 33; Gutheim, Worthy of the Nation, 239, 277.

projects aimed at rebuilding entire districts from scratch according to rational modernist principles, A Preliminary Report of the Findings of an Origin and Destination Traffic Survey in the Metropolitan Area of Washington, D.C. Conducted in 1948 insisted that ridding the District of traffic congestion would require "more than the mere salvage of old and obsolete roads." Asserting that "Highway transportation is one of the main props of our highly organized society," the report dismissed piecemeal road-widening and other minor improvements as unscientific stopgap measures. The highway department declared that the District's roadways would have to be "redesigned and rebuilt almost in their entirety." Unlike the narrow and inefficient prewar parkways, these new highways should be constructed "on a generous scale" in order to ensure "the safe, orderly, rapid flow of the vast traffic volumes that stream daily in and out of central business districts." Even when existing roads appeared capable of handling existing volumes of traffic--as was the case with Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway--they needed to be redesigned in order to serve anticipated traffic needs calculated decades into the future, and rebuilt accordingly. Mindful that their proposals might appear extreme to the amateur road-planners who composed the majority on the NCP&PC, District highway engineers asserted that the "non-professional point of view" in transportation matters was "superficial and incomplete, since it is essentially subjective." Asserting that the armchair deliberations of landscape architects and park protectors led to "numerous misconceptions" and stopgap "palliatives," the highway department claimed that its recommendations reflected the rigorously analyzed results of extensive statistical surveys. While City Beautiful-era planners based their grandiose schemes on aesthetic whims and outmoded Old World conceptions of urban form, the highway engineers boasted that they offer bold new plans for modern life that were grounded in scientific facts. Despite the highway department's proclamations, the NCP&PC postponed ruling on all major highway initiatives until after the completion of the commission's long-awaited comprehensive Washington-area regional plan.[296]

The 1950 Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital and Its Environs was a broad-based regional planning effort that addressed the development of the Washington metropolitan region on a grand scale. Instead of focusing primarily on the physical design of cities in the manner of their turn-of-the-century predecessors, postwar urban planners grappled with a wide array of issues including housing, land use, economic development, and broadly construed transportation policies. Acknowledging that traffic congestion had reached critical levels, the report recommended a three-pronged attack on the commuter problem. The comprehensive plan called for revamping the highway system, improving mass transportation, and dispersing federal employment beyond downtown Washington. In practice, however, highway improvement proposals continued to dominate District transportation planning throughout the 1950s. The report called for rapid implementation of the circumferential beltway and radial highway systems, emphasizing that "these new and improved main highways must be modern--at least divided highways, and preferably freeways for all types of traffic." Parkways restricted to pleasure traffic and express buses would also comprise an important component of the regional system. In order to guarantee "maximum traffic capacity and safety"--and to be eligible for federal funding--both freeways and parkways needed to be built to "high standards of curves, grades, and pavement width." The widely distributed general summary of the multi-volume comprehensive plan depicted Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway as an upgraded "express

---

[296] District of Columbia Department of Highways, A Preliminary Report of the Findings of an Origin and Destination Traffic Survey in the Metropolitan Area of Washington, D.C. Conducted in 1948 (Washington, D.C.: D.C. Division of Printing and Publications, 1950), vii; Gutheim, Worthy of the Nation, 239.

parkway" extending through the zoo to 16th Street. Regional highway officials, however, had more ambitious plans for the highly coveted Rock Creek valley corridor.[297]

The Regional Highway Commission was formed in 1950 in order to address mounting traffic problems in the Washington metropolitan area. This commission was dominated by highway engineers, being composed of representatives from the D.C. Department of Highways, the Maryland Roads Commission, the Virginia Department of Highways, the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads, the Military District of Washington, the Capital Transit Company, and the NCP&PC. The commission's report, issued in January 1952 and immediately adopted by the D.C. Highway Department, called for radically altering Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway to turn it into a major radial thoroughfare to accommodate the ever-increasing commuter traffic between downtown Washington and the northwest suburbs.[298]

As adopted by the District Highway Department, the plan envisioned transforming Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway into a modernized, six-lane expressway at an estimated cost of almost $7 million. The plan called for two additional lanes north of Q Street and the transformation of the parkway south of P Street into a southbound express route. Northbound traffic would follow 26th Street, which would be widened to expressway dimensions between Constitution Avenue and M Street, with grade separations to eliminate cross traffic. In a scheme reminiscent of pre 1924 parkway plans, 22nd and 23rd streets would provide direct access to the expanded parkway, turning the P Street Beach area into a maze of loops and overpasses. Waterside Drive, with its troublesome southbound entrance, would be closed off. Access to Massachusetts Avenue was provided by new roadways on the west side of the creek above Massachusetts Avenue Bridge, which would connect with a widened and repaved Normanstone Drive. The parkway bridge south of Connecticut Avenue would have to be expanded to accept six lanes of traffic. A grade-separation structure would theoretically solve the increased congestion where access roads from Calvert Street, Cathedral Avenue, and the zoo tunnel intersected. Above Connecticut Avenue, the report called for a four-lane highway extending through Rock Creek Park to U.S. Route 240 in Maryland.[299]

The proposed changes to Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and the threat of extending the parkway Rock Creek Park were greeted with markedly different responses, underscoring the different perceptions of the two parks. When compared to the impassioned resistance to highway construction in Rock Creek Park, the largely indifferent reaction to the proposed radical transformation of the parkway landscape suggests that Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was perceived primarily as a commuter thoroughfare rather than as a public park, and that it was increasingly regarded as inadequate for the needs of modern motorists. The Evening Star warned that the plans for an expressway through Rock Creek Park would undoubtedly create "fireworks," but asserted that the "improvement" of the parkway itself was a necessary measure that should provoke little controversy. The Evening Star contended that the 15-year-old road was so outdated that it could no longer

---

[297] National Capital Parks and Planning Commission, Washington: Present and Future: A General Summary of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital and Its Environs (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1950), 27.

[298] Harland Bartholomew and Associates, "A Report Upon Proposed Highway Improvement Program for the District of Columbia," (prepared for National Capital Planning Commission, 1952), 1.

[299] Harland Bartholomew and Associates, "A Report Upon Proposed Highway Improvement Program for the District of Columbia," 34-36.

legitimately be termed a parkway. "The first trouble with the parkway now is that it's not a parkway in the modern sense," complained the Star. "Modern parkways are divided." While the newspaper admitted the parkway was "fairly wide," it claimed that it was nevertheless too narrow for modern traffic. The newspaper complained that the parkway's entrances and exits were "another headache." The Calvert Street entrance was too steep and conflicted with the traffic from Cathedral Avenue, the curves on the P Street access roads were too sharp, Waterside Drive was too narrow, and the stoplights and turns at K Street and Virginia Avenue were inefficient and unsafe. The Star claimed that most Washingtonians agreed the parkway was overcrowded, and asserted that the one-way rush-hour traffic practice was confusing and dangerous. The continued reliance on the undependable zoo ford was also widely criticized. While the paper acknowledged that the proposed changes would regrettably "doom sunbathing in the 'P Street Beach,'" and usurp a bit of the playgrounds around Francis Junior High School, it asserted that these sacrifices were warranted in the interest of improved traffic flow into the heart of the city.[300]

The two consulting firms engaged by the National Park Service and the newly reorganized National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) to evaluate the District's Highway Improvement Program more-or-less agreed with the highway-boosting Evening Star, at least as far as Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was concerned. Harland Bartholomew and Associates questioned the scale of the proposed expressway, but conceded that, "Due to the overload of traffic on this important arterial thoroughfare, its improvement south of Connecticut Avenue as planned in the program would seem essential." The report cautioned, however, that in constructing the improvements, "great care should be exercised to reduce damage to the park to the greatest extent possible."[301]

Clarke and Rapuano's report to the National Park Service expressed more concern over the proposed changes to Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. This was to be expected, as Gilmore Clarke and Michael Rapuano were both noted parkway designers. Their report acknowledged that, "Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway has, since its opening, operated more as an arterial road than as a pleasure drive." Nevertheless, they advised that decisions on the parkway's future should take into account its value as an attractive and popular urban park. Their report asserted that, while servicing commuters was undoubtedly the parkway's dominant function, "The fact remains . . . that it is a route in an extremely pleasant setting and there are many who enjoy it for the reason at other times than during the rush hours." They maintained that, "The very existence of the valley of Rock Creek and of its adjacent park areas, within the limits of a heavily developed urban area, is a valuable contribution to a measure of gracious urban living." While affirming the significance of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway's naturalistic landscape, Clarke and Rapuano did not condemn the basic idea of expanding the main traffic artery. In terms of actual recommendations, they merely quibbled with proposed road alignments in the vicinity of Q Street Bridge and opposed the new Normanstone Drive access road. They contended that it would be impossible to construct an adequate roadway at the designated location and proclaimed that the attempt "would be ruinous to a rare bit of natural beauty in the urban area." Political considerations and elitist motivations may have informed this judgment, since the proposed access road would intrude on one of Washington's most exclusive neighborhoods.

---

[300] "Rock Creek Parkway Additions Would Doom 'P-Street Beach,'" Washington Evening Star, 27 February 1952. An accompanying photograph of the area depicted a predominantly female crowd of sunbathers.

[301] Harland Bartholomew and Associates, "A Report Upon Proposed Highway Improvement Program for the District of Columbia," 61-62.

In Clarke and Rapuano's defense, however, their report also strongly condemned the plan to route one of the new access roads through the site of a public swimming pool in the predominantly African-American neighborhood on the east side of the parkway, terming this "an unwarranted infringement on vital community facilities."[302]

The two consultant studies agreed on general planning principles. They both stressed the need to strike a balance between improving access to the central city and preserving the qualities that made the city of Washington attractive in the first place. The Clarke and Rapuano report characterized the opposing forces in this battle as the "Keep off the Grass" mentality of inflexible park defenders and the "There's a park; it's vacant, free land and provides an easy route to follow" attitude of the highway interests. Clarke and Rapuano conceded the need "to get the motor vehicle back and forth with reasonable efficiency," but they cautioned that, "In the process, we must not drive out of the central areas the substantial values that prevail when living in these areas is pleasant."[303]

Both reports cautioned against the District's single-minded focus on highway improvements at the expense of mass transit, pointing to the Comprehensive Plan's conclusion that new highway construction would never be able to keep pace with projected increases in suburban population. The consultants acknowledged that some highway improvements were necessary, but stressed that expressways should not be constructed solely on the basis of traffic volumes and destination surveys. Their effects on broader aspects of the urban experience needed to be factored into the engineers' calculations. The two outside reports also questioned some of the basic assumptions used by traffic planners to justify their projects. The Bartholomew report challenged the highway engineers' insistence that new expressways inevitably raised property values and stimulated local economies. While this was a favorite contention of highway advocates--and had proven true in the case of attractively designed suburban parkways--Bartholomew noted that the introduction of heavy traffic often adversely affected the quality of pre-existing residential neighborhoods. Clark and Rapuano similarly criticized the wisdom of building expressways through established residential areas. They asserted that parks were almost always better influences on property values. Parks were also better suited to promoting "those qualities within a city that add to the graciousness of urban living."[304]

Both reports stressed the symbolic importance of Washington's parks and public places, emphasizing the special care needed to ensure that traffic improvements would not detract from the

---

[302] Gilmore Clarke and Michael Rapuano, "Report on Certain Projects in the Highway Improvement Program of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia as these Projects Relate to the Parks and Parkways under the Jurisdiction of National Capital Parks of the National Parks Service" (New York: Clarke and Rapuano, 1952), 26-27.

[303] Clarke and Rapuano, "Report on Certain Projects in the Highway Improvement Program," 2, 27.

[304] The specter of race- and class-based prejudice raises its head again here. Statements about maintaining property values and "gracious living" in "pleasant" areas objected to the forced taking of desirable property owned by substantial citizens, but did not condemn the widespread practice of using road improvements as a means of evicting low-income tenants and homeowners in the name of "slum clearance" and "urban improvement." While both reports strongly criticized aspects of the highway improvement plan that threatened the affluent neighborhoods along the west side of Rock Creek Park and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, they expressed little concern for the major dislocations that would be caused in poorer neighborhoods by other segments of the proposed Inner Loop system. With the exception of the swimming pool comment, the consultants voiced little objection to the negative impact that widening 22nd and 23rd streets would have on the surrounding neighborhood. (Bartholomew and Associates, "A Report on Proposed Highway Improvement Program," 4-5, 49-52; Clarke and Rapuano, "Report on Certain Projects in the Highway Improvement Program," 2, 9, 26-29).

beauty and dignity of the national capital. Admitting that traffic improvements were necessary, the Bartholomew report stressed that, "A proper balance must be struck between the demands of traffic and the maintenance of the priceless scenic values and unspoiled character so carefully fostered since the city's founding." Clarke and Rapuano also praised the skill and foresight of L'Enfant and the McMillan Commission. They declared that Washington's planners had an historical obligation to protect the city's irreplaceable heritage of parks, monuments, and grand vistas from improvident "errors of expediency" that appeared to solve current problems but would not stand the test of time.[305]

Both Bartholomew and Clarke and Rapuano were particularly concerned with the effects the proposed highway improvements would have on the two jewels of the city's park system: the Mall and Rock Creek Park. Complacency toward the changes along Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway reflected its subsidiary role, first as a "park-link" and then as a commuter route. While it was an attractive roadway and served a useful purpose as a neighborhood park for surrounding residential areas, the parkway offered neither the extensive natural amenities of Rock Creek Park nor the monumental grandeur of the Mall and the Potomac waterfront. In fact, the consultants' greatest concerns about the proposed improvements to Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway were directed not at the effects on the parkway landscape itself, but at their potential impact on the more prestigious parks to the north and south. Bartholomew and Associates opposed a direct southbound connection between the Whitehurst Freeway and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway on the grounds that it would cause an undesirable increase in the amount of traffic through the Potomac parks. Both reports expressed concern about the inevitable pressure to extend the parkway through Rock Creek Park once it was expanded to a six-lane roadway.[306]

While the planners were more interested in the Highway Improvement Plan's impact on Rock Creek Park and the Potomac waterfront, discussions of these areas dealt with issues that immediately affected the parkway landscape. The waterfront leg of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was implicitly included in critiques of the Inner Loop highway's effect on the Potomac parks. The proposed expressway through Rock Creek Park, meanwhile, was generally referred to as "the Rock Creek Parkway extension," "the proposed Rock Creek Expressway" or other terms that explicitly connected it with Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway.

Clarke and Rapuano were vehemently opposed to the District Highway Department's plans to route the Inner Loop expressway through the Potomac parks and construct a new bridge across the Potomac at E Street. These "improvements" would place an unsightly express highway next to the Lincoln Memorial, vastly alter both Potomac parks, shatter the tranquility of the nature preserve on Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Island, and truncate the extensive and largely natural view up the Potomac River. In one of the most strongly worded sections of entire report, Clarke and Rapuano characterized this broad area of parkland, which included the waterfront section of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, as "a unique and eminently distinguished landscape composition, the heritage of countless millions of Americans spread over the years to come." They asserted, "This area of the

---

[305] Bartholomew and Associates, "A Report on Proposed Highway Improvement Program," 5; Clarke and Rapuano, ""Report on Certain Projects," 9.

[306] Bartholomew and Associates, "A Report on Proposed Highway Improvement Program," 27, 44.

City has, in itself, an aesthetic value that we firmly believe should not be impaired." According to Clarke and Rapuano, this section of the Potomac River, "together with the bordering park and parkway lands . . . [was] an integral and inseparable part of the Central Composition of The Nation's Capital." While acknowledging that, "Passenger vehicles cannot, of course, be excluded," Clarke and Rapuano declared "express highway facilities should not, under any circumstances, usurp this waterfront area." If traffic requirements really demanded an additional Potomac River crossing, the report declared that the unique character of the waterfront parks justified the additional expense of digging a tunnel under the river or relocating the new bridge well upstream in Georgetown, possibly adjacent to Key Bridge.[307]

The Commission of Fine Arts and the NCPC were also strongly opposed to the proposed Potomac bridge at E Street. When the Commission of Fine Arts discussed the issue in March 1952, John Nolen, Jr., lamented that the District Commissioners viewed the city's parks as "vacant land to be used as channels of communication to suit their purpose." U. S. Grant III added that the highway interests coveted parks because they were "not only vacant land, but vacant land that is already owned by the government." Nolen complained that the highway lobby dominated both the District commission and Congress, and that the proposed expressways were based solely on traffic considerations with no regard to their impact on the park system. The Commission of Fine Arts passed a resolution condemning the proposed E Street Bridge and emphasizing the need to protect District parks from further ill-conceived highway construction. Like Clarke and Rapuano, the Commission of Fine Arts didn't single out Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway by name, but praised the manner in which "a lovely stretch of the river has been preserved, together with the charming landscapes on both sides." The commission ruled that "the bridge proposed at E Street and carried directly across the Theodore Roosevelt Island would in large measure destroy the beauty of this remarkable landscape lying at the very center of greater Washington."[308]

The E Street Bridge battle dragged on for more than a decade, becoming embroiled in the ongoing debates over the Inner Loop and the proposed National Cultural Center (Kennedy Center). The NCPC and the Commission of Fine Arts continued to oppose the bridge, mixing practical criticisms of the bridge's dubious ability to solve traffic problems with strongly worded condemnations of the bridge's visual impact on the Lincoln Memorial and the Potomac waterfront. Nevertheless, under heavy pressure from the District Commissioners, Congress in 1954 approved plans for a bridge at what was billed as a compromise location crossing the foot of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway at Constitution Avenue.[309]

The NCPC and the Commission of Fine Arts were still not satisfied. Commission of Fine Arts member Joseph Hudnut lauded the Potomac waterfront as "an outstanding example of modern

---

[307] Clarke and Rapuano, "Report on Certain Projects in the Highway Improvement Program," 18-22.

[308] Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 28 March 1952, 24-34, Commission of Fine Arts Archives, Washington, D.C. The Commission even considered bringing Robert Moses down from New York to plead their case on the grounds that he was "a practical man" and well-respected by the highway interests. Grant ruled against this, observing, "I am inclined to be afraid that he would be in favor of a bridge anywhere. An additional bridge is just nuts to Mr. Moses." Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 28 March 1952, 27).

[309] H.R. 1980, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., "An Act to authorize and direct the Commissioners of the District of Columbia to construct a bridge over the Potomac River . . . ."; Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 16 September 1954.

civic art," and warned that the proposed bridge would "have a catastrophic effect on the area." The commission's chairman, David Finley, testified before the House Committee on the District of Columbia that the proposed bridge would create "a swirling traffic vortex that will disastrously affect the appearance of the entire area." Finley advised Congress that "a combination of natural elements and careful design" had made the Potomac waterfront "a civic landscape which approaches perfection in its relation of land, water, and air elements to the city and to the great national monuments which are placed in this area." He declared that the bridge and its approaches would "scar and mutilate this monumental river landscape. . . [and] irreparably damage the parkland and grassy slopes of the area surrounding the river." Finley repeatedly emphasized the symbolic importance of the waterfront parks to the city of Washington and to the nation as a whole. At the same time, he challenged the highway department's assurance that the proposed bridge would afford a lasting solution to the District's transportation woes, beseeching Congress to consider "whether we have the right to do this merely to gain some temporary alleviation of the traffic problem."[310]

Backed by the District commissioners and by powerful business interests both in the District and across the river in suburban Virginia, the District highway department steadfastly maintained that the proposed bridge was the only practical solution to intolerable traffic congestion. In a replay of the M Street Bridge debate, the highway department also contended that Commission of Fine Arts was only entitled to rule on the architectural treatment of structures and not on the location of the crossing or on the merits of the larger plan in which it played a part. The highway department manipulated this interpretation of the Commission of Fine Arts's authority to full advantage, employing what commission member Ralph Walker condemned as the "Bob Moses technique" for circumventing the authority of planning boards. As perfected by New York public works czar Robert Moses, this tactic consisted of manipulating planning authorities into passing piecemeal aspects of grandiose projects that they would never approve as a whole. According to the Commission of Fine Arts, the highway department disguised the nature and extent of their overall scheme by presenting it in such small segments that it was difficult, if not impossible, to grasp the way all the pieces fit together. As a result, the planning commissions found themselves approving individual components of structures whose locations and overall forms they vehemently opposed.[311]

The highway department repeatedly ignored the Commission of Fine Arts's requests for overall drawings of the Inner Loop system, presenting individual components of the Potomac bridge and associated connections in piecemeal fashion over the course of several years. As a result, the Commission of Fine Arts approved individual bridge abutments and spans while withholding approval of the overall bridge location and the placement of approach roads. The commission eventually agreed to approve a masonry bridge across the Potomac, on the condition that it be located further north along the parkway than Constitution Avenue. A year later, in 1958, the commission begrudgingly consented to a steel-girder structure, but held out for stone or concrete facing on the abutments, while continuing to protest the Constitution Avenue location. In January 1959 the commission insisted that the utilitarian bridge piers flanking Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway be decorated with sculptural elements portraying Theodore Roosevelt in various guises of soldier,

---

[310] Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 16 September 1954, 12; statement of Chairman David Finley to House Committee on D.C., in Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 5 April 1956.

[311] Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 16 September 1954, 12; Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 21 September 1961.

statesman, scholar, and outdoorsman. This idea was eventually dropped, but the commission later approved Laura G. Fraser's models of four oversized figures representing Power, Courage, Leadership, and Foresight for the same location. When the bridge abutments were constructed, however, these reliefs were discreetly forgotten.[312]

Even after construction on the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge began in 1961, the commission refused to approve its location. The commission also continued to oppose the system of approach roads connecting the bridge with the surrounding park drives and the proposed Inner Loop, which was now projected to run through a tunnel beside the Lincoln Memorial. Plans for these access roads called for a triple-decked structure sprawling across West Potomac Park and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The commission was hampered in its deliberations by the highway department's continued refusal to provide adequate drawings, but persistantly denounced the traffic engineers' desire to sacrifice "almost the entire parkway to accommodate the interchanges of an interstate system." Restating its opposition to the proposed bridge location and access roads in 1961, the commission lamented that, if the District Commissioners were allowed to carry out their plans, "It will now be impossible to restore the park-like character of the river that has long been planned there." The commission protested that the drawings of the proposed interchange, which it finally obtained secondhand from the NCPC, were "disturbing in their disregard for the proper use of park areas and for the way they crowded the Lincoln Memorial and the proposed Cultural Center."[313]

The Commission of Fine Arts also objected to the District Highway Department's 1959 proposal for an interchange between the Inner Loop and the Whitehurst Freeway. The District's initial scheme called for a three-level interchange, to be constructed largely in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway in the vicinity of the K Street overpass. The commission rejected the scheme for "impinging on the park land" and "giving a chaotic appearance." This location was not considered as critical as the Potomac waterfront site, however, and a modified, two-level interchange was approved in 1961.[314]

Plans for the Inner Loop highway underwent numerous modifications between its articulation in the 1940s and its partial completion in the 1960s. By the mid 1950s, the Inner Loop was conceived as a six- to-eight-lane figure-eight encircling downtown Washington. Since it was to be funded by the generous 90 percent cost sharing provided by the Federal Interstate Highway System, the Inner Loop was conceived as "a fully grade-separated highway system constructed to the highest possible design standard," with broad travel lanes and curves rated at a design speed of 50 mph. According to 1955 estimates, the system would cost almost $273 million. The western leg, which the Commission of Fine Arts and the NCPC viewed as the major offender, was projected as tunneling under or behind the Lincoln Memorial, running slightly inland through West Potomac Park and the waterfront section of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, then curving north toward Washington

---

[312] Letter, Finley to Col A.C. Welling, Engineer Commissioner of D.C., December 19, 1957, with Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, December 1957. This aspect of the commission's negotiations over the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge is recounted in the Minutes of the Commission of Fine Art for the following dates: 3 March 1958; 22 May 1958; 14 October 1959; 16 February 1961; 15 March 1961; 18 April 1961; 16 May 1961; 21 November 1961.

[313] Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 14 October 1961 and 16 February 1961.

[314] Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 18 November 1959 and 21 September 1960.

Circle and up 21st Street. Plans called for it to cut a swath through the mansions and embassies between Dupont Circle and Sheridan Circle, and then veer in a wide curve through Adams Morgan and back east, where it would reunite with a north-central leg located approximately along Fourth Street, NW. The District's earlier scheme of incorporating the southern half of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway directly into the Inner Loop was eliminated by 1955, after which the parkway was depicted as an "express parkway" continuing north into Rock Creek Park. By 1960, the Inner Loop's only direct incursions into the parkway landscape were the previously mentioned interchanges and a slight amputation of P Street Beach where the Inner Loop skirted Sheridan Circle.[315]

The Commission of Fine Arts opposed the Inner Loop both on general planning principles and for its outlandish encroachment on the District park system. Echoing Bartholomew's earlier arguments, the commission maintained that the proposed highway improvements were self-defeating in that they would only encourage more motorists to commute by automobile, and thus rapidly become as congested as the earlier generation of thoroughfares they were built to replace. At a November 1961 meeting of the NCPC re-evaluating the Inner Loop proposal, Commission of Fine Arts Chairman Finley contended that the planning profession had acknowledged the postwar mania for downtown loops and expressways was a misguided policy that had done little to ease congestion, while causing "havoc" in cities around the country. Finley asserted that the beauty of Washington "should not be sacrificed by cutting the city into islands in an effort to meet the traffic needs of local inhabitants or those who live in nearby suburban areas." Finley and other Inner Loop opponents argued in favor an improved rapid-transit system as "the most effective and least damaging means" of solving the commuting problem."[316]

Finley's arguments were bolstered by the results of the Mass Transportation Survey of 1955-57. Sponsored jointly by the NCPC and the National Capital Regional Planning Council, this was the first study of Washington's transportation needs conducted by a comprehensive planning agency rather than by highway engineers. The $400,000 study concluded that surface-transportation improvements would never keep pace with projected population growth. The attempt to solve the District's transportation problems through expressway construction alone would end up strangling the capital in a web of beltways and radial highways ranging in width from four to twenty-six lanes. In 1960 Congress passed the National Capital Planning Act, which called for a renewed investigation of the District's traffic needs, this time with equal emphasis on the development of mass transit. The ascendancy of anti-expressway community activist Elizabeth Rowe to the chair of the NCPC in 1962 represented another blow to the District Highway Department's dreams of a completed Inner Loop. While it was too late to prevent the inundation of a major portion of West Potomac Park and the bottom end of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway under a maze of bridge abutments and access ramps, the pressure to upgrade the parkway to expressway standards or insert various freeway segments in and around the parkway abated significantly in the mid 1960s. The District Commissioners made one last attempt to implement the Inner Loop and related in projects in 1966. This initiative was supported by the District Highway Department and the pro-development Federal

---

[315] De Leuw, Cather, and Company, "Report on Inner Loop Freeway System, District of Columbia: Engineering Studies and Estimates" (prepared for Board of Commissioners, Washington, D.C., 1955).

[316] "Remarks of David E. Finley, Chairman, Commission of Fine Arts, at the meeting of the National Capital Planning Commission, Washington, D.C., 9 November 1961, Subject: Inner Loop," Exhibit A, Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 9 November 1961. Gutheim, Worthy of the Nation, 291-293.

City Council, but opposed by citizens groups and the Commission of Fine Arts. The city engaged the consulting firm Arthur D. Little to conduct a study aimed at resolving the deadlock and settling the freeway question once and for all. To the District Commissioners' consternation, the Little report asserted that the highway department's plans were "based on insufficient data, and on questionable assumptions, and forecasting techniques." Ruling that the previous highway studies had "been carried out with inadequate regard for long range economic and social impact," the Little report recommended a moratorium on new freeway construction in the District.[317]

The Proposed U.S. 240 Extension through Rock Creek Park

The recurring battles over the proposed extension of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway through Rock Creek Park were equally acrimonious. The 1952 Recommended Highway Improvement Program restated the highway engineers' long-standing goal of constructing an express highway connection to U.S. 240 in Maryland. This plan was supported by the Maryland Roads Commission, which also wished to route a portion of the proposed outer beltway through the extension of Rock Creek Park into Maryland that had been acquired with funds provided through the 1930 Capper-Cramton Act. The NCPC and the NPS opposed these intrusions, resurrecting the 1918 Olmsted report's objections to excessive road construction in Rock Creek Park. The Commission of Fine Arts also spoke out against the renewed expressway proposal, asserting that "we will certainly do everything we can to avoid the projection of U.S. 240 through Rock Creek."[318]

This time, the District Highway Department remained conspicuously silent on the proposed improvements, allowing the Maryland Roads Commission to take the lead on the pro-expressway side of the debate. While District Highway officials busied themselves pressing for action on the southwest leg of the proposed Inner Loop, and temporarily downplayed the need for an immediate connection between Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and the District line, Maryland officials engaged in a widely publicized clash with the NCPC over their plan to extend U.S. 240 into Rock Creek Park. Expressway opponents interpreted the District Highway Department's uncharacteristic reticence as a strategic decision based on the hope that completion of the shorter and more politically feasible Maryland incursion into the park would create an insurmountable demand to fill in the final expressway segment between the District Line and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Unfortunately for the highway promoters, however, the fight over the proposed extension of U.S. 240 into the Maryland section of Rock Creek Park proved to be much tougher than they had envisioned.[319]

To begin with, the Maryland Roads Commission underestimated the extent of public opposition to their plan. Shortly after plans for the highway extension were announced, the NCPC

---

[317] Gutheim, Worthy of the Nation, 261-262, 291-293; Helen Leavitt, SuperHighway-Superhoax (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1970), 92-109; Little Report quoted in Leavitt, Superhighway-Superhoax, 92; Federal City Council, Freeways in the National Capital Region (Washington, D.C.: Federal City Council, 1966).

[318] Ray M. Schenck, Landscape Architect, NPS, "Preservation and Development of Rock Creek Park: Brief Review of Pertinent Sections of 1918 Report By Olmsted Brothers as Related to a 1953 proposal for a Rock Creek Express Parkway," 30 July 1953, in NCPC Parks and Reservations Planning File, RG 328, National Archives; Harry Thompson quoted in Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 17 November 1953, 8.

[319] Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 17 November 1953, 6-8.

and local letters-to-the-editor columns were inundated with protests against the proposed incursion into Rock Creek Park. Typical of the emotional responses to the prospect of an express highway through Rock Creek Park was former D.C. public librarian George Bowerman's plaintive query, "Why should the most beautiful section of Washington be spoiled to gratify the perverted ideas of speed maniacs?" U.S. Grant III, then head of the American Planning and Civic Association, wrote a stern letter to the NCPC stating that organization's opposition to the U.S. 240 extension. The Isaac Walton League, National Parks Association, Wilderness Society, and a host of other conservation organizations also came out against the plan. Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay went on record opposing the highway extension, calling it a "desecration" of invaluable parkland. Much of this outpouring reflected broad-based public indignation over the potential destruction of park values, but some of the most effective opposition came from influential Chevy Chase residents whose property values and privacy would be adversely affected by the proposed highway. The Maryland highway engineers had made the mistake of locating their proposed expressway through or near the backyards of a number of past and present government officials and other wealthy suburbanites, who were not at all pleased by the prospect of a highway invading their exclusive preserve. More than a dozen neighborhood groups banded together under the leadership of former North Dakota Senator Gerald P. Nye to form the Citizens' Action Committee for Fair Road Planning, which lobbied energetically against the highway proposal.[320]

While the majority of letters opposed the highway extension, several writers accused the highway opponents of selfish motivations and cultural elitism for objecting to a road that would benefit commuters in the more affordable outlying suburbs and provide greater access to a section of Rock Creek Park that functioned almost as a private preserve for wealthy Chevy Chase residents. John Kenmuir, who identified himself in a July 1953 letter to the Evening Star as "a suburbanite who must struggle through the few Washington streets capable of carrying traffic to the suburbs north of the capital," derided the "purple prose" and "crocodile tears" of "those who continually try to obstruct the normal advance of progress by crying about 'despoiling the beauties of nature.'" In addition to raising the issue of elitist protectionism, Kenmuir pointed to the example of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway as a road that both served commuters and enhanced the ability of District residents to enjoy attractive natural surroundings.[321]

Robert Wyman, chairman of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCP&PC), voiced similar sentiments in a letter to the NCPC confirming the Maryland commission's support for the expressway project. When the NCPC voted unanimously to oppose the U.S. 240 extension in June 1953, the Maryland planners--under heavy pressure from the Rockville Chamber of Commerce and Maryland Roads Commission Chairman Russell H. McCain--broke ranks

---

[320] Bowerman to NCPC, 14 June 1953; U.S. Grant III to NCPC, 25 June 1953; Nye to NCPC, 21 April 1953; McKay's statement appeared in a Department of Interior press release dated 7 July 1953; these letters and other petitions can be found in the NCPC Maryland Roads and U.S. 240 Planning Files, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives.

[321] Kenmuir asked the Evening Star's readers to consider whether "the lower part of Rock Creek Park has been spoiled or improved by the parkway that not only enables Maryland residents to ride into Washington in some degree of safety or comfort, but also permits District residents to proceed to Maryland and visit some real parks, free of sewage and crime problems?" John Kenmuir, letter to the editor, Washington Evening Star, 2 July 1953.

with their D.C. planning brethren and launched an acrimonious dispute that attracted national attention and threatened to disrupt regional planning efforts.[322]

Just as Virginia officials were pressing for additional Potomac River crossings in order to spur economic development in northern Virginia, Maryland developers, businessmen, and politicians were concerned that inadequate highway connections to downtown Washington would soon begin to slow growth in the northwestern suburbs. Maryland Road Commission consultants asserted that the rapidly rising commuter population in suburban Maryland made the construction of an express highway through Rock Creek Park a "top priority." McCain insisted that rapid completion of the proposed expressway was the only way to prevent the Maryland suburbs from succumbing to slow death through "traffic strangulation." Pent-up demand made the eventual construction of one or two more radial expressways inevitable, McCain claimed, so the NCPC should face the facts and acquiesce to the highway department's plans. McCain asserted that there was nothing the NCPC could do to prevent Maryland officials from proceeding with the project as far south as East-West Highway anyway, since the M-NCP&PC had given the necessary permission to use the Maryland portion of Rock Creek Park for the new thoroughfare.[323]

The NCPC interpreted the situation differently. The threatened Maryland sections of Rock Creek Park had been acquired through the Capper-Cramton Act, which specified that any future improvements be approved by both the M-NCP&PC and NCPC. The NCPC declared that the act thus gave it veto power over the U.S. 240 extension, but agreed to consider the possibility of modestly upgrading the existing park drive up to the District line. The NCPC argued that bringing a six-lane expressway down to the East-West Highway would only create a bottleneck at the District line, since there was little prospect that approval would ever be granted for a continuation through the original portion of Rock Creek Park. The NCPC did, however, agree to consider the Maryland Road Commission's concomitant proposal to utilize a small section of Rock Creek Park farther north as part of the proposed circumferential beltway, as long as this proposal was submitted as a request rather than as a *fait accompli*.[324]

The NCPC's position initiated a flurry of statements, counter-statements, and legal and political maneuvering. McCain and the M-NCP&PC asserted that the Capper-Cramton Act could not be interpreted as infringing on the sovereignty of the state of Maryland. At a special meeting called to discuss the highway issue, the majority of M-NCP&PC members reaffirmed their support of the road commission's plans and argued that the U.S. 240 extension was consistent with comprehensive regional planning guidelines that advocated the use of stream valley parks for traffic corridors. The M-NCP&PC made several conciliatory gestures, promising to minimize the highway's effect on residential areas and park scenery. The M-NCP&PC cited the Westchester County parkway system

---

[322] Minutes of NCPC, 25-26 June 1953; letter, Wyman to NCPC, 19 May 1953; Letter, Wyman to NCPC Acting Director Remon, 15 July 1953; "National Fight on Route 240 Shaping Up," Washington Evening Star, 8 December 1953; Letter, John Nolen, Jr., to Ralph W. Baxter, Director, Rockville Board of Trade, 25 February 1954; U.S. 240 Planning File, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives.

[323] Minutes of NCPC Meeting, 29-30 October 1953; press release, Russell H. McCain, Chairman of Maryland Roads Commission, 24 June 1953, U.S. 240 Planning File, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives.

[324] Minutes of NCPC meeting, 25-26 June 1953; NCPC statement, 26 June 1953; U.S. 240 Planning File, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives.

as an example of the successful integration of parks and commuter thoroughfares, once again taking the position that the proposed highway would bring more people into the park and thus increase the opportunity for Washingtonians to enjoy nature. The NCPC countered that significant differences between the Westchester system and the Rock Creek Park situation made this comparison irrelevant and misleading. A consulting engineer engaged by the M-NCP&PC agreed with this assessment, and subsequent statements dropped the Westchester County comparison, though the M-NCP&PC conspicuously shifted its terminology at this point and began referring to the proposed express route as a "parkway" in order to make it more palatable to potential opponents.[325]

This shift in nomenclature fooled no one, and only added to the intensity of the debate--especially after the NCPC granted permission to construct the beltway segment across the upper reaches of Rock Creek Park. The NCPC viewed the beltway segment as a justifiable compromise, since it only impacted a small section of the park and promised to relieve pressure for the more damaging direct route through the heart of the park. At the time, regional planners were debating the efficacy of circumferential beltways as a means of lessening congestion by dispersing traffic around cities and thus reducing the demand for high-volume radial expressways. The NCPC subscribed to this theory and undoubtedly felt it had achieved a major victory by trading a remote stretch of parkland for the more disruptive Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway extension. By stipulating that the beltway through the park be constructed to parkway standards with attendant prohibitions against trucks and commercial vehicles, the commission may have expected to defuse an issue that was generating increasingly embarrassing national scrutiny.[326]

Designating the proposed beltway segment a "parkway" fooled no one, however. Grant protested, "Calling a high speed expressway for trucks a 'parkway' as it enters the park, and then changing its name back again when it leaves, does not alter what it actually is." A barrage of letters poured in condemning the NCPC's decision to allow a "high-speed highway" or "expressway" through Rock Creek Park and ridiculing the disingenuous "parkway" designation. The Evening Star reported that expressway opponents were preparing to take their fight to Capitol Hill and the Supreme Court, if necessary. The paper described the controversy in terms sympathetic to the roadway opponents, and highlighted its national significance as a test case for highway encroachment in parks throughout the country. Former Senator Louis C. Cramton, co-author of the Capper-Cramton Act, expressed his outrage that a "scenic area so prominent in the scheme of the nation for a capital world famous for its beauty is to become simply an avenue for the ever-mounting streams of traffic." Cramton declared that the objective of the Capper-Cramton Act had been to secure land for "park areas, not high speed turnpikes," and objected to what he termed the "proposed desecration, or rather

---

[325] Press release, Russell H. McCain, Chairman of Maryland Roads Commission, 24 June 1953; Statement and Resolution of the M-NCP&PC, 30 June 1953; Nolen to Hugh R. Pomeroy, Westchester County Planning Commission, 27 July 1953; Memorandum, William M. Burgess, planning engineer, to M-NCP&PC, re: Observations on New York Parkway Inspection Tour as Related to Local Problems, 5 August 1953. Burgess contended that generalizations were impossible, and that all parkways had to be treated as individual cases: in the Westchester and New York instances, strong central planning and efficient mass transportation contributed greatly to the success of the parkway systems; neither of these factors appeared to him to be present in the Washington region (All in Maryland Roads and U.S. 240 Planning Files, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives).

[326] Minutes of the NCPC, 6-7 August 1953.

destruction, of Rock Creek Park by usurping that scenic and recreation area to superhighway and speedway use."[327]

Numerous citizens groups complained that the NCPC had either sold out or been duped by Maryland highway and development interests. Several owners of property adjacent to the proposed development even brought suit against the NCPC, charging the commission with violating the provisions of the Capper-Cramton Act. Park defenders warned that allowing the beltway to enter even a small portion of the park would set a dangerous precedent that would lead inevitably to the construction of the long-coveted radial thoroughfare connecting U.S. 240 with Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, along with the expansion of the parkway itself. Senator Nye, writing for the Citizens' Action Committee for Fair Road Planning, castigated the NCPC for "letting the highway camel get its nose under the tent" by approving the beltway link across the north edge of the park. According to the Regional Highway Planning Survey, carrying U.S. 240 down to the proposed beltway would increase traffic on Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway from 30,000 to 40,000 cars-per-day, even without the construction of a direct connection between U.S. 240 and the park roads. The Maryland Roads Commission, of course, had every intention of eventually pushing this connection through. The proposed "parkway" section of the beltway was itself an ill-disguised Trojan horse. While the M-NCP&PC attempted to ameliorate criticism by hiring the Olmsted Brothers firm to produce a detailed study of the road's impact, McCain insisted that the beltway segment be designed so that its parkway-like 30' grassy median could be easily converted into additional traffic lanes, thus creating a 200' wide, six-lane expressway.[328]

Nevertheless, the NCPC voted in June 1954 to authorize the beltway segment. The NCPC stipulated that the beltway could not be used as an extension of U.S. 240, and that no connection would be allowed from the beltway south in to the park. The NCPC maintained that diverting traffic from U.S. 240 via an express connection to the George Washington Memorial Parkway would provide adequate commuter access to the central city. Several proposals were developed for connecting this western beltway leg to downtown Washington. The favored solution called for an express parkway along the Potomac extending from the vicinity of Cabin John to K Street. Two alternative proposals called for a more northerly connection to the proposed Inner Loop via McArthur Boulevard, Whitehaven Parkway, and Dumbarton Oaks Park. These expressways would pass directly across Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and join the Inner Loop near Sheridan Circle. The D.C. Board of Commissioners' own consultants ruled against both of these proposals as exorbitantly expensive, technically impractical, and unjustifiably destructive of park values, noting that the required excavation and overpasses "would practically obliterate a section of over one-half mile in

---

[327] "National Fight in Route 240 Shaping Up," Washington Evening Star, 8 December 1953; letter, Cramton to Harlean James, secretary of American Planning and Civic Association, 4 September 1953; in U.S. 240 Planning File, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives. Actually, a considerable portion of the funds provided for in the Capper-Cramton Act were expended to purchase land for the construction of George Washington Memorial Parkway, which was designed for considerably higher speeds and greater traffic volumes than the earlier Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway.

[328] Letter, Action Committee for Fair Road Planning to NCPC, 23 October 1953; Stevens et al v Bartholomew et al, Civil Action No. 5379-53; traffic statistics are recounted in Minutes of NCPC, 6-7 August 1953; Letter, Nye to Bartholomew, 9 December 1953; Letter, McCain to Bartholomew, 28 October 1953; M-NCP&PC chairman Watkins traded heavily on the Olmsted Brothers' reputation in Washington park planning in a letter to NCPC chairman Bartholomew, 20 March 1954; in U.S. 240 Planning File, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives.

length of Rock Creek Park near Massachusetts Avenue and at the same time would detract from the beauty of the Japanese Embassy and require the removal of eleven other embassies."[329]

M-NCP&PC Chairman Robert Watkins objected that the NCPC's "highly restrictive conditions" jeopardized the successful implementation of the entire beltway project, which it termed the number one regional planning priority. McCain announced that the Maryland Roads Commission did not consider itself bound by the NCPC's decision, and would proceed in the best interests of Maryland commuters. The growing public furor and effective lobbying by conservation organizations and citizens' groups brought Congress into the fray in early 1955. Senator James Murray, chairman of the committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, introduced legislation on behalf of expressway opponents. Murray's resolution forbade the construction of new roads in the District portion of Rock Creek Park without congressional authorization and called for the NCPC to reconsider its approval of the disputed beltway segment. Public hearings on the matter were held in February 1955, with heated commentary coming from both sides. The NPS and representatives of various conservation organizations assailed the proposed construction, while highway promoters blasted their opponents for selfishly trying to restrict access to public park land to the fortunate few who could afford adjoining property in exclusive Chevy Chase. NCPC Chairman Harland Bartholomew defended the agency's compromise approach, praising parkways such as the proposed beltway segment as a "new form of public park use," while agreeing that they should not be permitted to "invade" large, centrally located naturalistic parks like Rock Creek Park.[330]

While Murray's resolution was not put to a full Senate vote, the concerted opposition to further road development in Rock Creek Park convinced the Maryland Roads Commission and the M-NCP&PC to back off from the more contentious U.S. 240 extension project and concentrate on establishing the cross-park beltway segment. When the beltway was incorporated into the Interstate Highway System in the mid-1960s, previous agreements to construct the Rock Creek Park segment to parkway standards and ban commercial truck traffic were conveniently forgotten.

Several attempts were made to revive the idea of a full-fledged express route through Rock Creek Park, most significantly in 1966, when the Lands Committee of the Metropolitan Council of Governments and the National Capital Regional Planning Council advocated restudying the highway route along the west side of the park. This proposal stemmed from a December 1965 meeting of the Montgomery County Planning Board, where concerns were again raised that inadequate highway facilities were retarding suburban development and making commuting miserable for Montgomery County residents. The Metropolitan Council of Governments transmitted the proposal to the NCPC without endorsing its contents. The Evening Star editorialized in favor of the renewed proposal,

---

[329] NCPC resolution, 24 June 1954; U.S. 240 Planning File, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives; Clarkson Engineering Company, "A Report of the Study on Location of Interstate U.S. Route 240, Washington D.C." (prepared for Board of Commissioners, Washington, D.C.: 1957).

[330] Watkins statement, M-NCP&PC meeting, 16 June 1954; McCain telegram to NCPC, 11 June 1954; S.J. Resolution 36, 84th Cong., 1st Sess.; Bartholomew statement before Senate Interior Committee hearing on S.J. Resolution 36, "For the Preservation of Rock Creek Park"; in U.S. 240 Planning File, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives.

criticizing the shortsightedness of earlier expressway opponents and praising the proposed roadway as "the most reasonable, logical solution" to pressing transportation needs.[331]

The re-emergence of the expressway threat precipitated a storm of protest in the letters-to-the-editors sections of the Washington Post and the Washington Evening Star. Many of these letters recounted earlier rejections of similar expressway proposals and underscored the continued public resistance to converting Rock Creek Park into a major traffic thoroughfare. The NCPC was equally unsympathetic to the renewed expressway proposal, which died a silent death as transportation officials increasingly focused on rapid transit as the most desirable means of solving metropolitan Washington's chronic commuting problem.

Additional Changes to Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway

While changing planning priorities and increasing public resistance to freeway construction prevented radical transformations of the parkway landscape, there have been several significant changes and numerous minor revisions. The most drastic alteration was the rechanneling of Rock Creek below P Street during spring and summer 1940. A shorter, more direct channel was excavated to reduce the easterly bend of the creek by several hundred feet, and facilitate improvements in the storm sewer system of the neighborhoods northeast of the parkway. The former creek bed was filled in and graded up to 22nd and 23rd streets, forming the area now known as P Street Beach. Contemporary drawings and photographs highlighted the open views across the creek at this point, but subsequent tree growth has obstructed the view in both directions.[332]

In the mid 1950s concern over the frequency of accidents on the curve at P Street prompted several changes to the roadway in this area. A rock-faced guardrail was erected during summer 1957 to keep speeding cars from plunging into the creek south of P Street Bridge. At the same time, the curves between P and K streets were widened, straightened slightly, and banked to improve cornering. The work was done by Curtin and Johnson, a Washington paving firm. This construction required closing several traffic lanes, which provoked complaints from Washington commuters who had become dependant on the parkway for quick access to downtown. Widening the roadway in this area forced the NPS to abandon the footpath between the creek and the road. Bridlepath and footpath were combined on the west side of the improved road surface. Another major repaving project in spring 1966 generated a similar barrage of complaints over traffic delays, and prompted Evening Star columnist John McKelway to speculate that Washingtonians would never live to see the roadway completed. The road surface has been refurbished numerous times since. According to Rock Creek Park maintenance chief David Newman, the parkway requires more frequent resurfacing than most roads because motorists routinely drive too fast along it.. The constant tire-slipping around the parkway's tight curves rapidly builds up rubber deposits that reduce the pavement's friction coefficient (gripping ability), and thus increases the danger of skidding out-of-control. Most of the roadway north of Virginia Avenue was resurfaced in 1991. During summer 1992 construction crews

---

[331] "Rock Creek Freeway Proposal is Revived," Washington Post, 15 April 1966; "Suburbs Ask Restudy of Park Freeway Plan," Washington Evening Star, 15 April 1966; "Back to the Park" (editorial), Washington Evening Star, 19 April 1966.

[332] Planning and Construction Division, National Capital Parks, "Report on Proposed Development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, Section II, 1940"; in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway File, History Department, National Park Service.

worked between Virginia Avenue and West Potomac Park, repairing the road base, improving drainage, replacing the precast concrete curbs with more attractive and durable granite curbing, renovating the belgian block median, replacing the drain covers with simulated- granite concrete units, and repaving the road surface.[333]

Changes in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway's vegetation and overall scenic character have also occurred over the years. Some of changes in the parkway landscape were carefully planned, while others have resulted from inadequate maintenance practices. Early conceptions of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway projected a more open landscape than now exists. The McMillan Commission sketches and the 1908 and 1916 renderings showed many open grassy expanses, with specimen trees and occasional clumps of foliage arranged in the manner of romantic landscape paintings and nineteenth-century parks. In the heavily forested area above Q Street, the original tree cover was to be preserved as much as possible. Below P Street, where the parkway landscape was hewn from ash heaps and mixed industrial uses, early drawings presented an open landscape, with grassy slopes leading up to the tree-lined border roads. Along the waterfront, parkway designers envisioned large, regularly spaced trees flanking the roadway in boulevard fashion. While the waterfront segment was configured as a formal avenue, the extensive planting plans prepared for other sections of the parkway emphasized naturalistic arrangements of mixed species. With the exception of the extensive daffodil beds between M and P streets, the designers tried to avoid an artificial look and favored more subdued and naturalistic plantings. The resistance to exotic species was exemplified by landscape architect Gilmore Clarke's objection to the park superintendent's plan to plant lilacs on newly regraded areas between M Street and Oak Hill Cemetery in 1943, on the grounds that lilacs were "purely gardenesque" in character and thus inappropriate for a naturalistic landscape like Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Clarke also cautioned that such ornamental species required additional maintenance and were more likely to suffer from pilferage.[334]

A wide variety of species were planted during and after the main parkway construction. WPA and other work-relief crews were extensively employed for grading, seeding, sodding, and planting operations in the mid 1930s. While detailed planting plans exist for many areas, landscape architects inspecting the parkway in 1992 determined that few of the original plantings remained. North of Q Street, a number of large trees pre-dating the parkway still exist, though the ground has become choked with a dense understory. In most areas, volunteer growth has obscured or succeeded the original planting. Some recent planting of specimen trees has occurred along the parkway, particularly in the more accessible areas in the vicinity of Virginia Avenue and in the open area south of the Connecticut Avenue Bridge.[335]

---

[333] "Changes Suggested in Parkway Traffic," Washington Post, 4 September 1955; "Wall Built on Parkway as Safety Measure," Washington Post, 10 September 1957; "Motorists Toughened by Tangles in Rock Creek Face Tougher Ones," Washington Evening Star, 7 July 1957; "Parkway Project to Start Monday," Washington Post, 20 July 1957; "Motorists Angry Over Parkway Tie-ups/Delay on Rock Creek Widening Causes Hazards, They Say," Washington Post, 30 January 1966; John McKelway, "The Rambler," Washington Evening Star, 22 April 1966; John McKelway, "The Rambler," Washington Evening Star, 7 May 1966; "Park Service Eases Tie-ups on Parkways and Memorial Span" Washington Post, 7 May 1966. Interview with David Newman, head of maintenance, Rock Creek Park, 12 August 1992.

[334] Letter, Gilmore Clarke to Arno Caemmerer, 29 March 1943.

[335] An extensive collection of grading and planting plans can be found in the National Archives Cartographic Division. The National Capital Parks photo collection in the Martin Luther King, Jr., Library Washingtoniana Collection contains numerous photographs of early planting and landscaping activities.

The original landscape architects conceived of the parkway as a succession of picturesque vistas. The towering forests of the upper parkway were intended to gradually give way to a more open landscape, where artfully placed trees enlivened broad expanses of carefully tended lawns. By 1992, however, volunteer growth had drastically transformed the parkway landscape. Above Q Street Bridge, unchecked vegetation has encroached upon many former clearings and engulfed many of the monumental bridges. Several important vistas, such as the view across P Street bend and the approaches to the Massachusetts and Q Street bridges, are now obscured by trees that have grown up since the parkway was completed. In some areas--notably where the multi-use trail runs along the west side of the creek in the vicinity of Q Street Bridge--dense thickets have created a safety hazard by blocking the view from the main drive to the multi-use trail. The sporadically maintained trail extending from Lovers Lane along the west side of Rock Creek poses a serious problem in this regard, as it is almost completely isolated from the main-traveled area of the parkway. The banks of the parkway below P Street, which were regularly mown through the 1960s, are now cut just once a year to prevent woody growth and to expose the daffodils in the spring. As a result, this area develops into an unkempt expanse of weeds and bushes by midsummer. Park managers maintain that the overgrown condition of much of the parkway landscape is not a deliberate policy but the result of a lack of funds. Park managers would like to restore open vistas, reduce underbrush, eliminate fallen timber, and generally improve maintenance along the parkway, but state that they do not have enough funding and manpower. They claim that the best they can do is to ensure that the immediate parkway corridor and the multi-use path are regularly maintained and keep the median strip near Waterside Drive open and well-mown to provide adequate visibility where the main traffic lanes and access roads converge.[336]

A 1987 Federal Highway Administration survey of park roads deemed much of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway to be well below federal standards for parkways in urban areas. The report contained many suggestions for improvements, but acknowledged that it was impossible to make the road conform to current parkway standards without adversely affecting the scenic quality and historic integrity of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The current opinion of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway's managers is that it is better to achieve the desired balance between traffic needs and resource capabilities by reducing or at least stabilizing commuter use rather than by drastically upgrading the road system. Park managers have considered lowering the overall speed limit to 25 mph and eliminating the one-way rush-hour configuration to lessen the parkway's desirability as a commuter route. This action would undoubtedly anger commuters, however, and is probably not politically feasible. While landscape-maintenance standards are not nearly as high as the early designers would have desired, the parkway functions as a pleasant and convenient route for commuters and remains popular with cyclists, joggers, and walkers. In fact, the ever-increasing number of cyclists has led to frequent conflicts among users of the narrow paved pathway. Park managers have opposed repeated calls to build an additional pathway or widen the existing multi-use trail, citing the need to preserve the limited open space along the bottom of the valley. Plans have been approved to remove the two unused access ramps flanking the Whitehurst Freeway. Together with the oft-stated goal of refurbishing the remaining vacant lots and abandoned industrial facilities along the Georgetown waterfront, this could eventually enable the junction of Rock Creek and the Potomac River to assume the scenic beauty and symbolic prominence that Olmsted and the other

---

[336] Current management policies were described by Rock Creek Park Assistant Superintendent Mike Brown and head of maintenance David Newman, in an interview at Rock Creek Park headquarters, 12 August 1992.

members of the McMillan Commission envisioned at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the meantime, these concrete megastructures function as *de facto* homeless shelters for a seasonally fluctuating population of destitute men and women, who serve as haunting reminders of the limited ability of landscape architects, traffic engineers, and city planners to solve society's problems through physical design alone.[337]

RELATED STRUCTURES

Harry T. Thompson Boat Center

Industrial development near the mouth of Rock Creek had long posed a problem to the designers and managers of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Paving companies and other unsightly industries occupied the privately owned waterfront west of Rock Creek long after the rest of the parkway had been restored to a semblance of its natural condition. In 1956 the NPS decided to build a boathouse for canoe rental and racing shell storage at the mouth of Rock Creek on the narrow government-owned strip of waterfront west of the creek mouth. Public health authorities objected to this proposal on the grounds that raw sewage was discharged into the Potomac nearby, but the NPS pressed on with its plans and began removing the remains of the old Washington Gas Light Company docks in 1957. Plans for a boathouse designed by architect William Haussmann were approved in January 1958. Associate Park Superintendent Harry T. Thompson steered the project through further opposition stemming from public health concerns and aesthetic objections to the vaguely Modernist rustic structure. When Thompson became park superintendent, he convinced Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton of the need for a boathouse on the site. Contracts for the boathouse, approach road, and parking lot were signed in fall 1959. The National Capital Water Sports Center was dedicated on September 24, 1960, and renamed the Harry T. Thompson Boat Center after the superintendent's death in February 1961. The boathouse can barely be seen from the parkway drive, but the accompanying parking area is highly visible--though parked cars hardly seem out-of-place amid the profusion of highway ramps, backed-up traffic, and stoplights that mark the parkway's junction with Virginia Avenue.[338]

U.S. Park Police Stable

The current U.S. Park Police stable near Taft Bridge was built in 1959 as a privately operated concession to replace the former Edgewater Riding Academy at 26th and D streets, which was displaced by the access roads for the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge. While most of the original bridle paths have now deteriorated or been paved to create the multi-use trail, horseback riders were long among the primary constituents of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Several riding stables flanked the parkway, and the broad, open area south of Taft Bridge was used in the

---

[337] Federal Highway Administration, Engineering Study, Rock Creek Park (Arlington, VA: Federal Highway Department Eastern Direct Federal Division, 1988). Information on current management policy from interview with Rock Creek Park Assistant Superintendent Mike Brown, August 12, 1992.

[338] For additional details on the boat center and private development on the west side of the creek mouth, see Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park, 115-118.

1920s-30s as an equitation field for local competitions. Development adjacent to the parkway gradually eliminated most of the privately owned stables, but riding in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway remained popular up through the 1950s. Efforts to build a public stable at the old pumping station site on the valley floor south of Massachusetts Avenue were rebuffed in the 1930s on the grounds that the parkway should remain free of such structures, but the loss of the Edgewater Stable prompted intensive lobbying by the Lower Rock Creek Riding Association, and convinced the NPS to approve a forty-horse facility tucked discreetly out of sight on the east side of Rock Creek just north of Taft Bridge. The contract for the stable was awarded to William L. Warfield of Falls Church, Virginia, for $87,500. The structure is unremarkable: another example of 1960s NPS rustic-modernism. While it can not be seen from the parkway, the stable's roof and the accompanying paddock are visible from the Taft Bridge, providing just the sort of discordant artificial note that Olmsted sought to avoid when he recommended against locating the Botanical Gardens in the same vicinity in 1911. In 1970 the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) commandeered the buildings while constructing the subway line nearby. The Edgewater Riding Academy relocated to a new building near Military Road in Rock Creek Park, next to another private stable that had been operating since 1958. The U.S. Park Police took over the facility when the WMATA relinquished its claim in 1979. While mounted police still patrol the trails in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, private horseback riding is currently forbidden.[339]

John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

While the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is outside the official boundaries of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, construction of the building in the late 1960s radically altered the waterfront segment of the parkway. Together with the construction of the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge and the Watergate complex, completion of the Kennedy Center in 1971 transformed an open vista of expansive lawns and graceful rows of trees stretching from the Lincoln Memorial to the mouth of Rock Creek into a progression of concrete edifices and soaring highway ramps.

Attempts to create a national theater in Washington date back at least to the 1930s. Congress passed a resolution calling for the construction of a national cultural center in 1938. This initiative provided little in the way of actual results. A 1953 bill to create a national war memorial and opera house also went nowhere. In 1955 Congress finally established a commission to plan a combined auditorium-civic center. The commission met in October of that year and considered several sites: the Southwest Development area, Foggy Bottom, and an under-utilized site on the Mall that was eventually used for the National Air and Space Museum. While the commission preferred the Foggy Bottom site, opposition was raised on the grounds that it would require a significant rerouting of the proposed Inner Loop freeway and also disrupt developers' plans to build luxury apartments and office buildings in the area.[340]

---

[339] T[homas] C. Jeffers, "Report on Possible Sites for Riding Stable in Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and Rock Creek Park," 20 March 1936, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Planning File, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives; Mackintosh, Rock Creek Park, 93-97.

[340] Roger Meersman, "The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts: From Dream to Reality," Records of the Columbia Historical Society 50 (1980): 525-87.

The commission agreed to restudy the alternatives, this time considering two potential Foggy Bottom sites: one at the approximate location of the current building and another larger site occupying most of the area within the trapezoid formed by Pennsylvania Avenue, New Hampshire Avenue, Virginia Avenue, and the parkway. In February 1957, the commission again ruled in favor of the original Foggy Bottom site. Leon Chatelein, Jr., president of the American Institute of Architects, described the stretch bordering Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway as "the only remaining beautiful site along the Potomac River," and asserted that this location provided "the proper and most attractive setting" for the proposed cultural center.[341]

Advocates of the southwest Washington site continued to press for their proposal, exerting political pressure to open the competition once again. After a brief flirtation with the Mall site, the Foggy Bottom location was again approved, and President Eisenhower signed legislation authorizing the selection in September 1958. In October 1959 architect Edward Durell Stone presented preliminary plans for the national cultural center. Stone's initial scheme called for a gigantic curvilinear structure to be located right on top of the parkway. The circular building--which looked more like a World's Fair pavilion or an airport terminal than a conventional theater--had an immense glass facade overlooking the Potomac and sweeping terraces extending 180' out into the river. Since Stone's building usurped a large portion of the waterfront segment of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, he developed a scheme for rerouting the parkway drive behind the cultural center.[342]

The Commission of Fine Arts enthusiastically approved Stone's design. Many supporters of the national cultural center were overjoyed with the site selection, seeing it as an improvement over the mixed industrial and commercial uses that still bordered the lower end of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Praising the waterfront location as "the ideal site for a center," Washington socialite and cultural center advocate Mrs. Robert Low Bacon announced, "Now foreigners visiting Washington will see a beautiful opera house next to the Lincoln Memorial instead of stables and an old brewery."[343]

Not everyone was happy with the proposed alterations to the open landscape of the Potomac waterfront, however. While strongest criticism was reserved for the impositions posed by the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge, aesthetic and practical objections were raised both to the cultural center's location and to Stone's extravagant design. The American Academy of Arts and Letters was one of the most prominent organizations to oppose the Potomac site. In a June 1960 address to the American Society of Landscape Architects, noted landscape architect and parkway designer Gilmore Clarke declared, "The construction of the Cultural Center on the site selected, together with the ill-considered roadway scheme, will result in the total destruction of an important park area of the District of Columbia." Clarke maintained that Stone's design was "much too large in scale to fit comfortably in the setting selected." He asserted that it would have the effect of

---

[341] District of Columbia Auditorium Commission, "Plans for a National Civic Auditorium and Cultural Center," prospectus submitted to the President and Congress, 31 January 1957, Commission of Fine Arts National Civic Auditorium Central File, RG 66, National Archives; Chatelein quoted in Meersman, "The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts," 536.

[342] Meersman, "The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts," 539-43; "Ike Endorses Center Site Expansion," Washington Post, 23 January 1961.

[343] "Washington Women Happy over New Cultural Center," Washington Evening Star, 25 August 1958.

"dwarfing the Lincoln Memorial, thus completely dominating a part of the City long ago dedicated to the high purpose of providing a broad park setting for the monument to the Great Emancipator." On a more pragmatic level, commuters expressed concern over the effects of the cultural center's construction on rush-hour parkway traffic. Several businesses slated for removal to relocate the parkway--most notably the popular Watergate Inn restaurant--held out for exorbitant sums of money and urged their customers to write letters protesting the proposed development.[344]

The cultural center organizers were experiencing other difficulties, as well. The original estimate of $25 million to $30 million had escalated to $50 million with the unveiling of Stone's design, and rose to $75 million by July 1961. Since the center was to be paid for by private funds, this price tag was unrealistically high. Stone was ordered to revise his grandiose design. In September 1962 the Commission of Fine Arts approved Stone's plans for a simpler, scaled-down project. Privately, the commission continued to express concern about the size of the building and its relationship to the site, but refrained from voicing objections so as not to imperil the fund-raising process, which was off to a very slow start. Stone's new proposal set forward the design that was eventually built, but called for a more pronounced balcony that cantilevered over the parkway and extended 20' over the Potomac River. While the Evening Star lauded this feature as a means of ensuring that "no sight or sound of traffic running directly underneath the building will mar the setting" for concert-goers, the Commission of Fine Arts complained the proposed balcony would disrupt the continuous strip of parkland extending from Arlington Memorial Bridge to the mouth of Rock Creek. The commission was also unhappy with the center's relationship to the access roads for the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge, which obstructed pedestrian access from central Washington to the cultural center.[345]

The Commission of Fine Arts was not alone in its skepticism over the design and siting of the cultural center. Nicholas Satterlee, president of the Washington Branch of the American Institute of Architects, complained that Stone's building would "overpower and dominate the waterfront." Wolf Von Eckardt, architecture critic for the Washington Post, ridiculed the design as "an oversized pavilion stuck away in a landscaped maze of highways." In an influential article, "Site for Cultural Center Wrapped in Spaghetti Maze," Von Eckardt asked whether "the best place for what is to be a physical manifestation of our culture is a traffic island between highways and freeways that is virtually inaccessible on foot." One could argue that such a site was ironically appropriate, given the automobile's profound impact on twentieth-century American culture, but Von Eckardt urged that the

---

[344] Gilmore Clarke's address to the ASLA 27 June 1960 quoted in "The National Cultural Center, Washington, D.C.," excerpts from a meeting of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, 1 December 1960," in Commission of Fine Arts Central Files, Fine Arts Act, public buildings: National Cultural Center Site, 1958-62, RG 66, National Archives; "Restaurant Patrons Asked to Write Letters Protesting Plans For Center," Washington Post, 12 June 1960; "Cafe will Expand on Art Center Site," Washington Evening Star, 25 September 1960; "Water Gate Inn Wants $1 Million for its Land," Washington Post, 30 September 1960; commuter concerns were raised in a letter from Charles Merwin to NCPC chairman Harland Bartholomew, 26 October 1959, NCPC Records, RG 328, National Archives.

[345] Meersman, "The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts," 542-48; "U.S. Culture Center Plan is Unveiled," Washington Post, 12 September 1962; "New Design for the Cultural Center is Approved by Fine Arts Commission, Washington Post, 20 September 1962; Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, 19 September 1962, 4.

cultural center be relocated to Pennsylvania Avenue in order to "preserve the beautiful Potomac site with its fine old trees."[346]

As fund-raising efforts geared up, the debate over the cultural center raged on, with the American Institute of Architects and other organizations continuing to advance other sites even after ground was broken for the new structure in December 1964. Excavation did not begin until summer 1965. After repelling several last-ditch efforts to change the site, construction began in January 1967. The cultural center, which had been designated the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts shortly after the president's assassination, finally opened on September 8, 1971. Proposals have occasionally resurfaced to restore Stone's original intention of a waterfront terrace by connecting a floating platform to the existing balcony with stairways reaching over Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, but this project has not yet been officially submitted to the Commission of Fine Arts or the NCPC.[347]

Watergate Complex

The extensive Washington Gas Light Company property east of the intersection of Virginia Avenue and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was offered for sale in 1947. The property languished on the market for several years before being acquired by a New York development syndicate in 1952. The purchasers announced plans to construct a luxury residential complex with commercial and retail facilities, but never realized their intentions. The property went through several owners during the 1950s and was eventually purchased by Island Vista, Inc., whose parent company was the Italian firm Societa Generale Immobilaire. Island Vista began planning its own luxury development, which it initially called "Watergate-Towne." The design, by architect Luigi Moretti of Corning, Moore, Elmore & Fischer, called for several curvilinear towers, which were intended to harmonize with Stone's original cultural center scheme.[348]

Upon learning of Island Vista's plans in November 1961, the Commission of Fine Arts urged the NCPC to make every effort to acquire the property, stressing the crucial role the gas-company site played in shaping the experience of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and the Potomac waterfront. Commission of Fine Art's Chairman Finley advised that the gas company property would be "a major contribution to the park system" and that it would compensate, at least in part, for the loss of adjacent parkland to highway construction and other developments. If the NCPC could not arrange to purchase the property, Finley suggested that it should at least assert its claim to the section of H Street that the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission had granted to the gas company in

---

[346] Satterlee quoted in "The JFK Center: Is It in the Wrong Place?" Washington Daily News, 20 August 1965; Wolf Von Eckardt, "Site for Cultural Center Wrapped in Spaghetti Maze," Washington Post, 16 December 1962.

[347] Meersman, "The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts," 554-76; information on floating terrace proposals is from conversation with Sue Kohler and other employees of the Commission of Fine Arts, August 1992.

[348] "Multimillion Housing Project Planned for Foggy Bottom," Washington Post, 8 October 1952; "Watergate Towne-Design Analysis," mimeograph, NCPC Watergate Towne Planning File, RG 328, National Archives; Ralph Becker attributes the Watergate Towers' curvilinear forms to the influence of Stone's design in Miracle on the Potomac: The Kennedy Center from the Beginning (Silver Spring, MD.: Bartleby Press, 1990), 35.

1916. To the Commission of Fine Arts' dismay, the NCPC declined to pursue the prospect of turning the gas company property into federal park land.[349]

After initially opposing the design, the Commission of Fine Arts in September 1962 granted approval to develop an apartment complex on the site, on the conditions that Island Vista reduce the height of the proposed towers from 160' to 130' and that the visual mass of the complex be further broken up with larger separations between the structures. The NCPC also predicated approval of the design on the condition of lowering the building height, though several commission members opposed the development entirely on the grounds that it was "contrary to accepted pattern of the waterfront in this area." Since the NPS and the NCPC had agreed to swap the contested H Street section and allow the developers to build across two other streets in exchange for a narrow strip of land along Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, the planning bodies maintained that Island Vista was obligated to provide substantial greenery and open space to ameliorate the visual impact their proposal would have on the adjacent park land. The developers objected that they could only provide the desired open space if they were free to build to the original height, and announced their intention to proceed as planned.[350]

A nationally syndicated Drew Pearson column first appearing in the Washington Post in August 1962 called attention to the developers' intentions. Pearson roundly applauded NCPC chair Elizabeth Rowe's "battle to block the huge Italian-designed motel-shopping-center-apartment house which a company financed by the Vatican wants to build on the Potomac River where it would dwarf the nearby Lincoln Memorial." Pearson's column precipitated a storm of angry letters to the NCPC. The majority of responses displayed a strongly xenophobic tone, and many revealed lingering anti-catholic sentiments stirred up by John F. Kennedy's recent election as the country's first Roman Catholic chief executive, but a number of writers also expressed specific concern over the apartment buildings' visual impact on the Lincoln Memorial and adjacent waterfront parks. The developers made some minor concessions in regard to the siting of the apartment towers, but defiantly sidestepped the height provisions. Measuring the maximum building height from the higher ground fronting Virginia Avenue rather than from the parkway itself allowed the company to circumvent the various commissions' height stipulations. Despite its proclamations that the separations between the buildings were "integrated extensions of the parkland itself," the complex management has obstructed public access to this self-described "virtual parkland" by routinely locking the gates along the border of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway.[351]

---

[349] Letter, Finley to NCPC chair Elizabeth Rowe, with Commission of Fine Arts minutes, 21 November 1961; Commission of Fine Arts minutes, 16 January 1962.

[350] Commission of Fine Arts minutes, 20 March 1962 and 18 September 1962; NCPC minutes, 1 February 1962 and 1 March 1962; "Watergate Towne-Design Analysis," mimeograph, NCPC Watergate Towne Planning File, RG 328, National Archives.

[351] Drew Pearson, "Washington Merry-Go-Round: A Countess Fights Autos in Venice," Washington Post, 27 August 1962 (widely syndicated in newspapers throughout the country); hundreds of these letters can be found in the NCPC Watergate Towne Planning File, RG 328, National Archives.

SOURCES CONSULTED

Archival Sources:

Commission of Fine Arts Central Files, RG 66, National Archives:
- Fine Arts Act, Public Buildings, National Cultural Center Site, 1958-62
- National Civic Auditorium
- National Cultural Center Clippings
- Parkways and Highways Clippings

Commission of Fine Arts General Files, RG 66, National Archives:
- District of Columbia Playgrounds

Commission of Fine Arts Project Files, RG 66, National Archives:
- Calvert Street Bridge Project File
- Connecticut Avenue Bridge Project File
- M Street Bridge Project File
- P Street Bridge Project File
- Rock Creek Park Project File
- Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Project File
- Q Street Bridge Project File
- Titanic Memorial Project File
- William Jennings Bryan Memorial Project File

Minutes of the Commission of Fine Arts, Commission of Fine Arts collection, Washington, D.C.

National Capital Parks Photograph File, Martin Luther King Memorial Library, Washington, D.C.

"Photographs of Rock Creek Parkway, Present Condition," looseleaf notebook ca. 1916, Commission of Fine Arts collection, Washington D.C.

Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, RG 328, National Archives.
- Planning Files, 1924-67:
  - Freeways
  - Highway Plan
  - Inner Loop
  - Highway Plan Survey of 1941
  - Highway Plan Report of 1952
  - Maryland Roads
  - Route 240
  - Park, Parkway, and Playground Committee
  - Parks and Reservations, miscellaneous
  - Rock Creek Park and Parkway

Records of the National Park Service, RG 79, National Archives.
National Capital Region Roads File

Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers, RG 77, National Archives
Office of the Chief of Engineers Document File, 1894-1923

Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Parks of the National Capital, RG 42, National Archives:
Correspondence of the Office of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, 1897-1918
Minutes of the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park 1894-1917
Records of the Assistant Engineer in Charge of Rock Creek Park, 1907-1918
Records of the Rock Creek Park Commission and the Board of Control of Rock Creek Park
Records of the Rock Creek and Potomac Park Commission, 1915-1933.

Rock Creek File, Peabody Room, Georgetown Public Library.

Rock Creek Park File, Washingtoniana Collection, Martin Luther King Memorial Library, Washington, D.C.

Rock Creek Park Photograph File, Washingtoniana Collection, Martin Luther King Memorial Library, Washington, D.C.

Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway File, Washingtoniana Collection, Martin Luther King Memorial Library, Washington, D.C.

Books and Reports:

American Institute of Architects. Washington in Transition: Twenty-Seven Articles devoted to the Physical Environment of the National Capital, past, present, and future. Washington D.C.: the American Institute of Architects, 1963.

Appleyard, Donald, Lynch, Kevin, and Myer, John. The View from the Road. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1964.

Bartholomew, Harland, and Associates. "A Report Upon Proposed Highway Improvement Program for the District of Columbia." Report prepared for National Capital Planning Commission, 1952.

Becker, Ralph. Miracle on the Potomac: The Kennedy Center from the Beginning. Silver Spring, MD: Bartleby Press, 1990.

Belasco, Warren. Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979.

Bennett, J[esse] M[erle]. Roadside Development. New York: MacMillan, 1929.

--------. Roadsides: The Front Yard of the Nation. Boston: The Stratford Company, 1936.

Blake, Peter. God's Own Junkyard. New York: Holdt, Rhinehardt, Winston, 1964.

Borchert, James. Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850-1970. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980.

Brown, Glenn, ed. Papers Relating to the Improvement of the City of Washington, District of Columbia. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901.

--------. Memories, 1860-1930. Washington: W. F. Roberts, 1931.

Brownlee, David. Building the City Beautiful: The Benjamin Franklin Parkway and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, distributed by University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989.

Bruce, Arthur G. Highway Design and Construction. Scranton, PA.: International Textbook Company, 1934.

Buxton, Barry M. and Beatty, Steven M. Blue Ridge Parkway: Agent of Transition. Boone, N.C.: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1986.

Caemmerer, H. P. Washington: The National Capital. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932.

Clark, G. E.. "Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway; Revised Estimates and Designs for the Development of the Parkway. 1 July 1929."

Clarke, Gilmore and Rapuano, Michael. Report on Certain Projects in the Highway Improvement Program of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia as these Projects Relate to the Parks and Parkways under the Jurisdiction of National Capital Parks of the National Parks Service. New York: Clarke and Rapuano, 1952.

Clarkson Engineering Company. "A Report of the Study on Location of Interstate U.S. Route 240, Washington D.C." Report prepared for Board of Commissioners, Washington, D.C., 1957.

Cranz, Galen. The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982.

Cutler, Phoebe. The Public Landscape of the New Deal. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

Davis, J. Tait. "Parkways, Values, and Development in the Washington Metropolitan Region." In Highway Research Record, Number 16: Consequences of Highway Improvement. Washington, D.C.: Highway Research Board, 1963.

De Leuw, Cather, and Company. "Report on Inner Loop Freeway System, District of Columbia: Engineering Studies and Estimates." Report prepared for Board of Commissioners, Washington, D.C., 1955.

District of Columbia Department of Highways. "Twenty-four years of Progress in Highway Development, 1924-1948." Department of Highways, Washington, D.C., 1948.

--------. A Preliminary Report of the Findings of an Origin and Destination Traffic Survey in the Metropolitan Area of Washington, D.C. Conducted in 1948. Washington, D.C.: D.C. Division of Printing and Publications, 1950.

Fairmount Park Guard Pension Fund Association. Descriptive Souvenir of Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, Pa. Philadelphia: Reichert and Company, 1915.

Federal City Council. Freeways in the National Capital Region. Washington, D.C.: Federal City Council, 1966.

Federal Highway Administration. Engineering Study, Rock Creek Park. Arlington, VA: Federal Highway Department Eastern Direct Federal Division, 1988.

Fisher, Irving. Frederick Law Olmsted and the City Planning Movement in the United States. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986.

Foster, Mark S. From Streetcar to Superhighway: American City Planners and Urban Transportation, 1900-1940. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981.

George Washington University. "Parkway Impact Study: An Investigation of the Effects of Parkways in the National Capital Region." Report prepared for National Capital Region-National Park Service, 1962.

Giedion, Sigfried. Space, Time and Architecture. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941.

Goode, James M. The Outdoor Sculpture of Washington, D.C. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974.

--------. Capital Losses: A Cultural History of Washington's Destroyed Buildings. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979.

Green, Constance McLaughlin. Washington: Village and Capital, 1800-1878. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962.

--------. Washington: Capital City, 1879-1950. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.

--------. The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967.

J.E. Greiner Company and De Leuw, Cather & Company. Transportation Plans for Washington. Report prepared for Board of Commissioners, District of Columbia, 1946.

Gutheim, Frederick (National Capital Planning Commission). Worthy of A Nation: The History of Planning for a National Capital. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1977.

Highway Research Board. Expressways, Bulletin No. 16. Washington, D.C.: Highway Research Board, 1947.

Hubbard, Henry V. and Kimball, Theodora. An Introduction to the Study of Landscape Design. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1924.

Inashima, Paul Y. Rock Creek Park and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway: Archeological Survey Report: An Archeological Investigation of Thirty-One Erosion Control and Bank Stabilization Sites Along Rock Creek and Its Tributaries. Denver: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Denver Service Center, 1985.

Jackson, John Brinckerhoff. American Space: The Centennial Years: 1865-1876. New York: Norton, 1972.

Jacobs, Jane. The Death and Life of Great American Cities. New York: Random House, 1961.

Junior League of Washington. An Illustrated History of the City of Washington. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977.

Kasson, John. Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900. New York: Grossman Publishers, 1976.

Kimball, Theodora. Manual of Information on City Planning and Zoning. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923.

Kinkead, Eugene. Central Park: The Birth, Decline, and Renewal of a National Treasure. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1990.

Kostof, Spiro. America By Design. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Kowski, Francis, ed. The Best Planned City: The Olmsted Legacy in Buffalo. Buffalo, N.Y.: Burchfield Art Center, 1991.

Krakow, Jere L. Historic Resource Study: Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, George Washington Memorial Parkway, Suitland Parkway, Baltimore-Washington Parkway. U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service, 1990.

Labaree, John. How Greenways Work: A Handbook on Ecology. Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1992.

Leach, Sara Amy. "Fifty Years of Parkway Construction In and Around the Nation's Capital," In Roadside America: The Automobile in Design and Culture. Edited by Jan Jennings. Ames, Iowa: Iowa University Press, 1991.

Leavitt, Helen. Superhighways Superhoax. New York: Doubleday, 1970.

Lesko, Kathleen M.; Babb, Valerie; and Gibbs, Carroll R. Black Georgetown Remembered: A History of Its Black Community from the Founding of 'The Town of George' in 1751 to the Present Day. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991.

Little, Charles. Greenways for America. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.

Longstreth, Richard, ed. The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991 (Studies in the History of Art, 30; Symposium Papers 14). Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991.

McCormick, Charles H. Milling in Rock Creek Park. Washington, D.C.: National Park Service Division of History, 1967.

Mackintosh, Barry. Rock Creek Park: An Administrative History. Washington, D.C.: History Division, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, 1985.

Meikle, Jeffrey. Twentieth Century Limited: Industrial Design in America, 1925-1939. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979.

Moore, Charles. Washington Past and Present. New York: The Century Company, 1929.

Mumford, Lewis. From the Ground Up: Observations on Contemporary Architecture, Housing, Highway Building, and Civic Design. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1956.

Myer, Donald B. Bridges and the City of Washington. Washington D.C.: U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, 1973.

Nash, Roderick. Wilderness and the American Mind. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973.

National Capital Park and Planning Commission. Annual Report, 1928. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1928.

--------. Plans and Studies, Washington and Vicinity; National Capital Park and Planning Commission Supplementary Technical Data, 1928. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1928.

--------. Annual Report, 1929. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1929.

--------. Reports and Plans, Washington Region; National Capital Park and Planning Commission Supplementary Technical Data, 1930. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1930.

--------. Annual Report, 1931. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931.

--------. Annual Report, 1932. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932.

--------. Washington: Present and Future: A General Summary of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital and Its Environs. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1950.

National Capital Planning Commission. The Nation's Capital: A Policies Plan for the Year 2000. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961.

--------. Toward a Comprehensive Landscape Plan for Washington, D.C. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1967.

--------. Planning Washington 1924-76: An Era of Planning for the National Capital and Environs. Washington, D.C.: National Capital Planning Commission, 1976.

National Capital Regional Planning Council. The Regional Development Guide, 1966-2000. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966.

National Commission of Fine Arts. The Plan of the National Capital. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1923.

National Conference on City Planning. The Development of the National Capital and its Environs. Washington, D.C.: National Conference on City Planning, 1928.

--------. Planning Problems of Town, City, and Region, Papers and Discussions, 1930. New York: National Conference on City Planning, 1930.

Newell, Frederick Haynes, ed. Planning and Building the City of Washington. Washington, D.C.: Washington Society of Engineers, 1932.

Newton, Norman T. Design on the Land: The Development of Landscape Architecture. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.

Nolen, John and Huhbard, Henry V. Parkways and Land Values, Harvard City Planning Studies, v. 11. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937.

Olmsted, Frederick Law. Landscape into Cityscape: Frederick Law Olmsted's Plans for a Greater New York City. Edited with an introductory essay and notes by Albert Fein. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967.

--------. Civilizing American Cities: A Selection of Frederick Law Olmsted's Writings on City Landscapes. Edited by S. B. Sutton. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971.

Parkways: Past, Present, and Future: Proceedings of the Second Biennial Linear Parks Conference. Boone, N.C.: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1987.

Parsons, Samuel. Landscape Gardening Studies. New York: John Lane Company, 1910.

-------. The Art of Landscape Architecture: Its Development and Its Application to Modern Landscape Gardening. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915.

Patton, Phil. Open Road: A Celebration of the American Highway. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986.

Potomac Planning Task Force. The Potomac: A Report on Its Imperiled Future and a Guide for its Orderly Development. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1967.

Rapuano, Michael and Halprin, Lawrence. The Freeway in the City. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1968.

Relph, Edward. The Modern Urban Landscape. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.

Report of Brevet Brigadier General N. Michler, Major of Engineer Corps, U.S. Army, in Charge of Public Buildings, Grounds, Works, etc. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1868.

"Report On Proposed Development of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, Section II." Acting Chief, Planning and Construction Division, National Capital Parks, 1940 (from History Department, National Park Service, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway File).

Reps, John. Monumental Washington: The Planning and Development of the Capital Center. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967.

-------. Washington on View: The Nation's Capital Since 1790. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

Rosenzweig, Roy and Blackmar, Elizabeth. The Park and the People: A History of Central Park. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992.

Schlesinger, Arthur M. The Rise of the City: 1878-1898. New York: Macmillan, 1933.

Shurtleff, Arthur A. Future Parks, Playgrounds and Parkways. Boston: Boston Park Department, 1925.

Schuyler, David. The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.

Sears, John. Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Sherwood, Suzanne Berry. Foggy Bottom 1800-1975: A Study in the Uses of an Urban Neighborhood. Washington, D.C.: Center for Washington Area Studies, George Washington University, 1974.

Smith, Kathryn Schneider. Port Town To Urban Neighborhood: The Georgetown Waterfront of Washington, D.C. 1880-1920. Washington, D.C.: The Center for Washington Area Studies of the George Washington University, 1989.

Snow, Brewster, ed. The Highway and The Landscape. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1959.

Taft, William Howard, and Bryce, James. Washington: The Nation's Capital. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1915.

Tourbier and Walmsley, Inc. "Landscape Architectural/Historic Survey of Parks and Boulevards." prepared for Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners, Kansas City, MO., n.d.

Tunnard, Christopher and Pushkarev, Boris. Man-Made America: Chaos or Control? New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963; reprint edition: New York: Harmony Books, 1981.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Annual Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds, and the Care and Maintenance of the Washington Monument, in the District of Columbia, appendix CCC to Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1899. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1899.

--------. Annual Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds. . . ., appendix HHH to Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1900. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900.

--------. Annual Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds . . ., appendix EEE to Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1903. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1903.

--------. Annual Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds . . ., appendix DDD to Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1904. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904.

--------. Annual Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds . . ., appendix DDD to Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1905. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1905.

--------. Annual Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds . . ., appendix EEE to Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1906. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1906.

--------. Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds . . ., appendix HHH to Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1907. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1907.

--------. Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds . . ., appendix GGG to Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1908. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1908.

--------. Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds . . ., appendix EEE to Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1909. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1909.

--------. Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds . . ., appendix FFF to Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1910. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1910.

--------. Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds, appendix EEE to Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1912. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1912.

--------. Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds. . ., appendix CCC to Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1914. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1914.

--------. Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds. . ., extract from Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1915. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915.

--------. Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds. . ., extract from Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1916. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916.

--------. Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds. . ., extract from Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1917. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917.

--------. Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds. . ., extract from Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1918. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918.

--------. Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds. . ., extract from Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1919. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919.

--------. Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds. . ., extract from Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1920. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920.

--------. Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds. . ., extract from Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1921. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921.

--------. Report upon the Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds. . ., extract from Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers for 1923. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1923.

U.S. Congress. House. Report of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway Commission: 1916. H. Doc. 114, 64th Cong., 1st Sess., 1916.

U.S. Congress. Senate. Communication of N. Michler, Major of Engineers, to the Chairman of the Committee of Public Buildings and Grounds, relative to a suitable site for a public park and presidential mansion. Sen. Doc. No. 21 to Accompany S. 549, 39th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1867.

U.S. Congress. Senate. Communication from the Engineer Commissioner, District of Columbia, submitting estimates of the Cost of Converting Rock Creek into a Closed Sewer, in Response to a Resolution of July 22, 1892. Misc. Doc. No. 21, 52nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1893.

U.S. Congress. Senate. Report Upon Improvement of Valley of Rock Creek, from Massachusetts Avenue to Mouth of the Creek. Sen. Doc. 458, 60th Cong., 1st Sess., 1908.

U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on the District of Columbia. Report of the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia on the Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia. Washington. D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902.

U. S. Congress. Senate. Committee on the District of Columbia. The Mall Parkway: Hearing Before the Committee on the District of Columhia of the United States Senate, Saturday, March 12, 1904, on the Bill (S.4845) Regulating the Erection of Buildings on the Mall, in the District of Columbia. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904.

U.S. Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital. Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1926. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1926.

--------. Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1927. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1927.

--------. Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1928. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1928.

--------. Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1929. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1929.

--------. Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1930. Washington. D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1930.

--------. Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1931. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931.

--------. Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1932. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932.

White House Conference on Natural Beauty. "Beauty for America: Proceedings of the White House Conference on Natural Beauty, May 24-25, 1965. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965.

Whyte, William H. The Last Landscape. New York: Doubleday, 1967.

Wilson, William H. The City Beautiful Movement. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

--------. "The Ideology, Aesthetics, and Politics of the City Beautiful Movement." In The Rise of Modern Urban Planning. Edited by Anthony Sutcliffe. New York: St Martins, 1980.

Zaitzevsky, Cynthia. Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Periodicals:

Abbot, Stanley. "Parks and Parkways: A Creative Field Even When the Task is to Avoid Creation." Landscape Architecture (October 1953): 22-24.

Abbuehl, Edward, H. "A Road Built for Pleasure." Landscape Architecture 51 (July 1961):233-237.

American Society of Landscape Architects. "Highway Aesthetics." Landscape Architecture 48 (October 1957):28-31.

American Society of Landscape Architects Committee on Public Roads, Controlled Access Highways, Parkways. "Public Roads, Controlled Access Highways, Parkways." Landscape Architecture 35 (January 1945): 55-57.

--------. "Public Roads, Controlled Access Highways, Parkways." Landscape Architecture 36 (April 1946): 98-101.

--------. "Public Roads, Controlled Access Highways, Parkways." Landscape Architecture 39 (April 1949): 113-116.

--------. "Public Roads, Controlled Access Highways, Parkways." Landscape Architecture 40 (July 1950): 166-182.

--------. "Public Roads, Controlled Access Highways, Parkways." Landscape Architecture 42 (January 1952): 71-77.

--------. "Public Roads, Controlled Access Highways, Parkways." Landscape Architecture 43 (January 1953): 72-76.

--------. "Public Roads, Controlled Access Highways, Parkways." Landscape Architecture 45 (April 1955): 150-158.

--------. "Public Roads, Controlled Access Highways, Parkways." Landscape Architecture 46 (April 1956): 147-150.

--------. "Public Roads, Controlled Access Highways, Parkways." Landscape Architecture 47 (April 1957): 421-429.

--------. "Public Roads, Controlled Access Highways, Parkways." Landscape Architecture 49 (Spring 1959): 173-181.

Associated Landscape Architects of Cleveland. "A Permanent Policy of Roadside Improvement." Landscape Architecture 26 (January 1936): 78-88.

Bache, Rene. "Motoring with Mr. Croesus." Outing 45 (March 1905): 714.

Barnett, Joseph. "Arterial Routes and Urban Development." Landscape Architecture 38 (July 1948): 145-147.

Bartholomew, Harland. "A Proposed Parkway System for Lucas County, Ohio." Parks and Recreation 13 (March-April 1930): 260-267.

Bond, James. "Parkways in Relation to Residential Areas." Parks and Recreation 15 (December 1931): 228-237.

Burchell, H. P. "The Automobile as A Means of Country Travel." Outing 46 (August 1905): 536-541.

"Charles Moore: A Biographical Minute." Landscape Architecture 33 (January 1943): 60-61.

Clarke, Gilmore. "Park Bridges." Parks and Recreation 10 (May-June 1927): 447-450.

--------. "Bridges: The Past Compared to the Present." Parks and Recreation 11 (September-October 1927): 19-23.

--------. "Landscape Construction Notes. XXXV. Notes on Texture in Stone Masonry." Landscape Architecture 21 (April 1931): 197-208.

--------. "Civic Art: Our Highway Problem." The American Magazine of Art 25 (November 1932): 287-290.

--------. "Some Views on Highway Design." Paper presented before the Association of Highway Officials of the North Atlantic States at Atlantic City New Jersey, February 13, 1936.

--------. "Westchester Parkways: An American Development in Landscape Architecture." Landscape Architecture 28 (October 1937): 40-41.

--------. "Beauty: A Wanting Factor in the Turnpike Design." Landscape Architecture 32 (January 1942): 53-54.

--------. "Our Federal City Parks." Landscape Architecture 45 (July 1945): 193-198.

--------. "The Parkway Idea." In The Highway and The Landscape, 32-55. Edited by Brewster Snow. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1959.

Cormier, Francis. "Some New York City Parks and Parkways: Recreational Developments Made Since 1934." Landscape Architecture 24 (April 1939): 124-136.

--------. "Appearance: Essential Element in Highway Design." Landscape Architect 32 (January 1942): 55-56.

Deakin, Oliver. "The Rockefeller Memorial Highway: A Notable Instance of Roadside Improvement in New Jersey." Landscape Architect 38 (April 1948): 95-97.

--------. "Our Part in Highway Design: Building Toward, Utility, Safety, and Attractiveness." Landscape Architecture 47 (October 1956): 291-292.

D'Enville, C. M. "The Automobile Commuter." Country Life in America 15 (January 1909): 260-261.

Ditchy, Claire W. "The Better Way of Life: Responsibility of the Professions for Greater Vision." Landscape Architecture 45 (July 1955): 199-201.

Downer, Jay. "Sensitive Imagination and the 'Feeling of the Land.'" Landscape Architecture 30 (April 1940): 120.

Earl, John. "What It Costs To Run An Automobile." Outing 44 (January 1912): 428-433.

Eliot, Charles W. "Welfare and Happiness in Works of Landscape Architecture." Landscape Architecture 1 (April 1911): 145-153.

Eliot, Charles W. II. "The Influence of the Automobile on the Design of Park Roads." Landscape Architecture 13 (October 1922): 27-37.

Elwood, P. H., Jr. "Planning Highway Landscapes." Landscape Architecture 21 (April 1931): 180-184.

"Frederic Adrian Delano: A Biographical Minute." Landscape Architecture 43 (April 1953): 130-131.

"Freeways in the Urban Setting." Landscape Architecture 53 (October 1962): 73-79.

Grant, Ulysses S. 3rd. "Planning the Nation's Capital." Records of the Columbia Historical Society 50 (1952): 43-48.

Gubbels, Jac. L. "A Part of the Organization, Not and Added Luxury." Landscape Architecture 30 (April 1940): 119.

--------. "Texas Landscapes for Safety: The Psychological Approach to Highway Planting." Landscape Architecture 30 (January 1940): 59-65.

Hall, George D. "The 'Freeway': A New Thought for Subdividers." Landscape Architecture 21 (January 1931): 115-118.

--------. "Beauty Designed into the Highway, Not Added Superficially." Landscape Architecture 30 (April 1940): 118.

Harper, Mr. "American Landscape." Landscape Architect 40 (July 1950): 182-183.

"Highway Definitions." Landscape Architecture 40 (April 1950): 130-131.

Hubbard, Theodora Kimball. "H. W. S. Cleveland: An American Pioneer in Landscape Architecture and City Planning." Landscape Architecture 20 (January 1930): 92-111.

Huystedt, Godwin. "Where are the Cars of Yesteryear?" Outing 46 (January 1913): 500-504.

Jackson, J. B. "Highway Planning." Landscape Architecture 47 (July 1957): 504-505.

James, E. W. "Parkway Features of Interest to the Highway Engineer." Better Roads 10 (April 1929): 21-27.

James, Harlean. "Tendency to View Landscape Contribution as Final Step." Landscape Architecture 30 (April 1940): 117-118.

"James L. Greenleaf: A Minute on his Life and Service." Landscape Architecture 24 (October 1933): 1-4.

"Jay Downer: A Biographical Minute." Landscape Architecture 40 (January 1950): 79-80.

Lang, F. C. "Need of a Comprehensive Plan of Highway Improvements." Landscape Architecture 30 (April 1940): 119-120.

Lay, Charles Downing. "Highways and Country-Planning." Landscape Architecture 8 (April 1917): 133-137.

--------. "Bronx Parkway." Landscape Architecture 10 (January 1920): 103-104.

Manning, Warren H. "Travel Ways of Beauty." Landscape Architecture, 20 (July 1930): 323-326.

McFarland, J. Horace. "Twenty Years of Scenery-Saving in America." Landscape Architecture 20 (July 1930): 301-307.

McHarg, Ian. "Where Should Highways Go?" Landscape Architecture 57 (April 1967): 179-181.

McMahon, L. E., and Bourquin, Alice I. "Detroit's Evolution of an Expressway System." Landscape Architecture 44 (October 1953): 5-10.

Meersman, Roger. "The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts: From Dream to Reality." Records of the Columbia Historical Society 50 (1980): 525-587.

Mergen, Bergen. "Children's Playgrounds in the District of Columbia, 1902-1942." Records of the Columbia Historical Society 50 (1980): 383-397.

"The Model Mile, 1949-1950." Landscape Architecture 41 (October 1950): 35-36.

Moore, Charles. "The Making of A Plan for the City of Washington." Records of the Columbia Historical Society 6 (1903): 11-23.

Morris, C. O. "The Truth About the Automobile." Country Life in America 15 (January 1909): 259-260.

Moses, Robert. "The Comprehensive Parkway System of the New York Metropolitan Region." Civil Engineering 9 (March 1939): 160-162.

--------. "New Highways for a Better New York." Landscape Architecture 36 (April 1946): 101.

Mumford, Lewis. "Traffic vs. A Balanced Environment." Landscape Architecture 48 (July 1958): 241.

"The Nazi Autobahnen." Landscape Architecture 35 (July 1945): 157.

Newman, Gene W. "Dallas' Green Backbone." Landscape Architecture 54 (April 1964): 202-204

Nichols, Arthur. "Landscape Design in Highway Development." Landscape Architecture 30 (April 1940): 113-117.

"Olmsted and the Washington Plan." Landscape Architecture 35 (October 1944): 27-28.

Olmsted, Frederick L., Sr. "A Letter Relating to Professional Practice from F. L. Olmsted, Sr., to Charles Eliot." Landscape Architecture 11 (July 1921): 189-190.

Olmsted, Frederick L., Jr. "Park Department Organization." Landscape Architecture 4 (July 1914): 15-16.

--------. "Principles of City Planning." Landscape Architecture 10 (July 1920): 172-174.

--------. "What is 'Professional' Practice in Landscape Architecture?" Landscape Architecture 11 (July 1914): 133-146.

--------. "Border Roads for Parkways and Parks." Landscape Architecture 16 (October 1925): 74-84.

--------. "Congratulations--and Landscape Architecture." Landscape Architecture 20 (July 1930): 287-291.

Olmsted, J[ohn] C. "Classes of Parkways." Landscape Architecture 6 (October 1915): 38-48.

"Parkways." Landscape Architecture 35 (October 1944): 15.

Paumier, Cy, Jr. "Plans and Compromises in Chicago 1964-68." Landscape Architecture 58 (July 1968): 291-293.

Perkins, Ernest T., and Stelling, A. Carl. "The Connecticut Turnpike: Safety, Health and Welfare Through Roadside Development." Landscape Architecture 47 (April 1957): 402-411.

"Public Works." Landscape Architecture 23 (July 1933): 258.

"Roadside Improvement." Landscape Architecture 23 (July 1933): 258.

Schermerhorn, Richard, Jr. "Samuel Parsons." Landscape Architecture 14 (July 1924): 231-234.

Schoemaker, Louis P. "Historic Rock Creek." Records of the Columbia Historical Society 12 (1909): 38-52.

Shurtleff, Arthur A. "The Effect of the Automobile on the Design of Parks." Landscape Architecture 11 (April 1921): 111-114.

Simonson, Wilbur H. "Planning for Roadside Improvement." Landscape Architecture 23 (July 1933): 247-257.

--------. "Some Desirable Policies in Roadside Development." Landscape Architecture 24 (January 1934): 91-99.

--------. "The Roadside Picture: A Hindrance to Traffic? Or an Inspiring Asset to Travel?" Landscape Architecture 30 (October 1939): 26-36.

--------. "Advanced Designs for Post-War Highway Needs." Landscape Architecture 33 (July 1943): 130-131.

--------. "Highway Development in Broad-Scale Planning." Landscape Architecture 45 (July 1953): 162-165.

--------, and Royall, R. E. "Roadside Improvement." Landscape Architecture 24 (July 1934): 198-209.

Sinclair, A. Leftwich, Jr. "History of the Automobile in the District of Columbia." Records of the Columbia Historical Society 48-49 (1949): 143-153.

Sloss, Robert. "The Working Automobile." Outing 45 (April 1912): 39-43.

Spratt, Zack. "Rock Creek's Bridges." Records of the Columbia Historical Society 53-56 (1959): 101-34.

Stewart, Ralph. "The Pennsylvania Turnpike and Its Landscape Treatment." Landscape Architecture 32 (January 1942) 47-52.

"Thomas C. Jeffers, Sr.: A Biographical Minute." Landscape Architecture 42 (July 1952): 173-174.

Tindall, William. "The Origins of the Parking System." Records of the Columbia Historical Society 4 (1901): 75-99.

Trustees of the American Society of Landscape Architects. "Express Highways and Park Land." Landscape Architecture 44 (January 1954): 103.

"Washington is a Whirlpool of Automobiles." Literary Digest 56 (March 2, 1918): 68-69.

Weismantel, William. "How the Landscape Affects Neighborhood Status." Landscape Architecture 56 (April 1966): 190.

"What Do Folks Use Their Car For?" Literary Digest 79 (November 11, 1923): 68-69.

Wild, Carl W. "Designing Highways for Peace and Defense." Landscape Architecture 32 (July 1942) 137-139.

Wirth, Conrad. "Our National Capital." Parks and Recreation 13 (Jan-Feb 1930): 110-116.

ADDENDUM TO:
ROCK CREEK & POTOMAC PARKWAY
(Reservation 360)
Rock Creek Park
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS DC-697
DC,WASH,~~686~~ 632-
HABS
DC
WASH,
632-

PAPER COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001