Frederick Law Olmsted: Reimagining the U.S. Capitol Grounds

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**Introduction**

“When ages grow to civility and elegancie, men come to build stately sooner than to garden finely.”¹ – Lord Bacon

In a letter of March 28, 1874, landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted expressed his dissatisfaction with the way the federal government managed both the grounds of the U.S. Capitol and the public grounds in Washington, D.C. He wrote that:

[The public grounds are managed] in an absurd and wasteful way under the advice and control of nearly a dozen independent Committees of Congress, assisted by nearly as many heads of bureaus and other officials, architects, surveyors and gardeners.²

The conditions Olmsted decried reflected the political conditions that plagued the management of public works projects throughout the history of the city’s development. From the creation and implementation of French designer Pierre Charles L’Enfant’s 1791 visionary plan of the city and throughout the evolution of Washington, D.C. in the 19th century, politics controlled the management and development of public space. Therefore the political history of the city has become inextricably tied to the history of its development, including the major public works projects such as the construction of public buildings, infrastructure, and public grounds.
The Capitol in Washington, D.C. is one of the most symbolically significant and architecturally impressive buildings in the United States. The Capitol functions as the meeting place for Congress, but it is also symbolically representative of the nation. The building is one of the best-known symbols of democratic government in the world. However, the building does not exist in a vacuum. Rather it is the crowning structure within a designed urban space. To fully grasp the symbolic significance of the Capitol, we must understand how it relates to its setting, in particular to the promontory on which it was erected, a site that often is taken for granted.

Visiting the Capitol today, one sees the Capitol building and its grounds existing harmoniously. (Fig.1) The assumption might be made that the two were designed and constructed in concert. In reality, achieving the complementary relationship between the building and its grounds as it exists today was the result of decades of political maneuvering and debate. Ultimately, it was the vision of landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted that brought the Capitol grounds to its current state. On March 6, 1873, Senator Justin Morrill commissioned Frederick Law Olmsted to design the grounds surrounding the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. In addition to a scheme for the landscape, Olmsted’s design included a terrace that would support the base of the building. Olmsted worked on the grounds from 1874 until 1882, and retired as superintendent of the terrace project in 1885, although it wasn’t completed until 1892. Olmsted’s plan transformed the unsatisfactory state of the grounds into a model of landscape treatment that enhanced the visual effect of the Capitol building.
The distinctive landscape complemented the monumental architecture of the Capitol and integrated the building into the landscape of the city.

In this thesis, I will examine the history of the Capitol grounds. I will trace the evolution of the site from its first appearance in Pierre L’Enfant’s 1791 original plan of Washington through the landscape projects developed by the architects of the Capitol such as Benjamin Henry Latrobe, Charles Bulfinch and Thomas U. Walter, who worked with politicians and bureaucrats such as Commissioner of Public Buildings Benjamin French and Senator Justin Morrill. I will explain how the political inner workings of the legislature influenced the physical development of the grounds. Finally, I will focus on the political and historical circumstances that led to the hiring of Frederick Law Olmsted by Congress in 1873, under whose leadership led to the physical and symbolic unification of the grounds and the Capitol building.

Histories on Washington, D.C have attributed to the popular notion that L’Enfant’s vision of the city was abandoned and only to be restored by the 1901 McMillan Commission. It is understood that the McMillan Commission introduced the first comprehensive urban plan into the city. No cohesive design for the urban landscape existed before Olmsted. In this thesis I will suggest that it was Frederick Law Olmsted with his plan for the Capitol grounds and greater vision for the monumental city that first resurrected L’Enfant’s lost plan. Although Olmsted only landscaped the grounds surrounding the Capitol, his vision of a unified federal core would be realized within following decade. Because of the succession of these two major landscape projects for Washington, D.C, I believe that Olmsted’s design for the grounds has been overlooked by the McMillan Plan’s large-scale urban
transformation. However, it is evident that Congress’s support for Olmsted’s plan indicates that efforts to improve and integrate the urban landscape in Washington were underway before the McMillan Plan. Olmsted’s plan, which was endorsed by the Senate, and specifically Senator Justin Smith Morrill This thesis is about Frederick Law Olmsted’s design for the Capitol grounds, which bridged two distinct eras in the urban development of Washington, D.C.

History of Washington, D.C.’s Urban Development

The establishment of Washington, D.C. was the result of a series of political compromises that were meant to ensure national unity by accommodating sectional interests. Before 1800, the seat of government in the United States had been located in cosmopolitan and economically established cities such as New York from 1789 to 1790 and Philadelphia from 1790 to 1800. The decision to relocate the nation’s capital so far from the cosmopolitan centers of the north was primarily a political decision. The United States at the beginning of the nineteenth century was a predominantly agrarian society with the rural population outnumbering its urban counterpart. Urban landscape historian David Schuyler suggested that the relocation from Philadelphia to a remote, rural site “undoubtedly expressed one ideological conviction… that agriculture was the most virtuous way of life and that cities were necessary evils.” This ideology and the location of the new Federal District favored southern interests. However, the compromise also called for the federal government’s assumption of states debts from the Revolutionary war. The compromise on a southern location in exchange for the assumption of states debts favored northern
interests as the northern states had accumulated considerable debt, which the southern states would have to help pay. Thus, the founding fathers aimed to compromise sectional interests to create an enduring federal bond with the establishment of the Federal District, which encouraged a republic based on Northern capitalism located in the agrarian South.

This compromise, known as the Residence Act of 1790, determined the specific location of the new capital, which had not been predicated in the Constitution. The Constitution granted exclusive power to Congress over the federal district. The creation of a new federal district through the cession of land by Virginia and Maryland allowed the new federal government to have authority over itself, thereby avoiding future political conflict caused by overlapping national and local jurisdictions. In creating an independent “territory” of Columbia, it also attempted to thwart the competition of cities and states for the economic benefits and prestige that would follow with title of the new capital.6

Washington D.C. was deliberately designed to be a capital city that reflected the republican ideals of the new federal government. The founding fathers recognized that a national capital was necessary for establishing the identity of the new republic. In a letter to John Jay from 1786, George Washington expressed this concern: “I do not conceive we can exist long as a nation without having lodged some where a power, which will pervade the whole Union in as energetic a manner…”7 Theorist Henri Lefebvre has called Washington “a symbolic city where the values of the Nation are on public display.”8 Through the production and organization of space, the founding fathers conceived of Washington as a city to both physically and
symbolically represent the intentions and power of the new government and nation. First, the city had to unify the "loose confederation of independent, contentious states" under the auspices of a national identity. Second, Washington would affirm the presence of a strong centralized government. Third, the city would communicate the legitimacy of the new country to other nations and exhibit "America’s parity with the European capitals." 

The plan for Washington, originally designed by Pierre L’Enfant in 1791 and revised by Andrew Ellicott in 1793, physically communicated the democratic ideals of the newly formed nation. L’Enfant’s plan, which drew from his knowledge of European capital cities, featured broad diagonal avenues and carefully placed public parks. Each diagonal street was named after one of the American states, and each avenue’s proximity to the city’s central public buildings signified the importance of its role in the process of creating the nation. An important aspect of L’Enfant’s plan was the establishment of prospects and views, which would become an essential condition in creating a setting for the Capitol building. In L’Enfant’s memoir, he explained that the diagonal avenues would encourage the city’s growth by “connect(ing) each part of the city… by giving them reciprocity of sight, and by making them thus seemingly connected, promote a rapid settlement over the whole extent.” The idea of prospect served a more symbolic faculty in the placement of major governmental buildings. L’Enfant chose Jenkins Hill, “which stands as a pedestal waiting for a superstructure” for the Capitol building so that it would command the view of the city and serve as a physical and symbolic reminder of the federal government’s power. 

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L’Enfant situated the Capitol building as the central element in the organization of the city and the landscape. The grounds are a converging point for the city’s major directional throughways. Located at the eastern end of the Mall, the Capitol site forms the central node of the city and integrates the two major converging diagonal avenues, Pennsylvania avenue from the northwest and Maryland avenue from the southwest, that span the length of the west side of the city. Thus, the site of the Capitol is the visual and spatial origin of two major axes of the city. The merging of large avenues from all directions of the city: New Jersey avenue from the southeast and northwest, Maryland avenue from the northeast and Pennsylvania avenue from the southeast, reinforce the notion of centrality.

However, when L’Enfant was dismissed and his plan altered, his artistic, monumental vision of the city was lost. Andrew Ellicott, the surveyor who appropriated the plan, but made small, yet significant changes to it, did not possess the same artistic genius as L’Enfant. Without L’Enfant’s involvement to fully realize his artistic vision of the city, Washington failed to artistically develop into the dignified and monumental capital city that its founders and originals designers had hoped it would be.

The physical development of Washington occurred slowly because of the nature of the city’s foundation. Unlike other comparable European national capitals such as London, Paris, or Rome, the city is not the result of a natural pattern of urban creation and growth over long periods of time that stemmed from a single source of power or economic activity. The influx of competing interests and lack of financial resources also hindered the growth and initial success of the city. Despite the early planner’s
vision and expectations of the city, Washington did not immediately develop into a viable urban entity. The site was swampy and disease-ridden. There was no industry and very little commercial activity. Regular changes of administration meant that most government employees were only temporary residents, and the city suffered financially from the deficiency of taxpayers. Before the 20th Amendment to the Constitution was enacted in 1933, each Congress met twice in two sessions during its two-year term. They met for a “long session” from the first Monday in December to April or May, and for a second “short session” from December to March. Thus, they only resided in Washington for these respective sessions and retained permanent residence in their respective constituencies. Well into the nineteenth century, the federal government’s weak financial situation and absence of resident taxpayers undermined large-scale investments on infrastructure and public works.

Conflicting interests within the government also thwarted the construction of the Capitol. Appropriations were often diverted towards the larger task of building the infrastructure of the city. Chronic insolvency caused the greatest threat to the construction process. On March 31, 1796, Congress voted to implement a loan guarantee of three hundred thousand dollars to begin construction on public buildings. With Congress still located in Philadelphia, government support of the subsequent loan guarantees implied faith in the future of the federal city. Having to rely on loans, money became a recurring issue for the board of commissioners. It wasn’t until 1802 that the Capitol received its first annual appropriation from Congress. While government appropriations initially helped stabilize the construction process, future misspending and mismanagement hindered the building’s development and
threatened the faith that had been invested in Washington. In addition, creative
differences due to a succession of six different architects, whose plans and work were
often redesigned and rebuilt, also thwarted the process.

For several decades Washington remained a bucolic city with a rural landscape
that remained largely un-built. Both the President’s House and the Capitol were
unfinished and small public and private buildings were scattered throughout the
settlement. For the first four decades, government interests focused the internal
improvements on the major public buildings. In the 1840’s and 1850’s, architect
Robert Mills constructed major public buildings such as the Treasury, Patent Office
and Post Office along the mile and a half stretch from the Capitol building to the
President’s House. At this time, residential areas developed in clusters around these
major terminuses. The business district developed along Pennsylvania Avenue from
the foot of Capitol Hill to 9th street. Along Pennsylvania Avenue, where L’Enfant
intended to create a “cultural-ceremonial thoroughfare,” a commercial space
developed, lined with hotels, restaurants, taverns and small retail establishments.

As early as the 1820’s and 1830’s, economically driven internal improvements
were the first to be realized. A network of canals were built in order to connect trade
between Washington and its surrounding port cities, Alexandria and Georgetown. The
ports and canals oriented Washington towards the Potomac River, however, the
introduction of railroads diminished the city’s focus on the river. The establishment
of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad with a direct line to Washington, D.C, assured
that railroads were destined to become the dominant transportation mode of the
future. The railroads would later dominate the city’s landscape and reorient the city towards a regional context.¹⁹

By the 1840’s and 1850’s, Washington had surpassed its neighboring port cities and emerged as a viable urban center of economic growth. Between the 1840’s and the 1860’s, the district’s population nearly doubled as people flocked to the city in search of employment. The construction of new public buildings under architect Robert Mills in the 1840’s that dwarfed the structures of the neighboring cities appeared as visual landmarks of the capital’s increasing strength.²⁰ In the 1850’s, Washington began to evolve into a cosmopolitan city with the growth of cultural institutions and development of public grounds. In October 1850, a group of influential politicians and businessmen in Washington approached President Millard Fillmore with the idea of landscaping the public grounds that would later become the National Mall. In 1851, the Smithsonian Building Committee appointed landscape gardener Andrew Jackson Downing to landscape the “whole Mall, including the Smithsonian grounds, into an extended landscape design.”²¹ Until the 1840’s, the cultural thoroughfare that L’Enfant had envisioned had served as a public common for grazing and agriculture. The objectives of Downing’s design were to “form a National Park,” to provide an example of a natural style of landscape gardening “which may have an influence on the general taste of the country,” and to create a “public museum of living trees and shrubs.” While Downing’s design aimed to introduce landscaped public space into the urban fabric, the project was abandoned following Downing’s sudden death in 1852.²²
The 1850’s saw the modernization of infrastructure under the direction of both the federal and municipal government. Army engineer Montgomery C. Meigs oversaw the modernization of the city’s waterways that brought an adequate water supply to the growing city. The system of water supply had a profound effect on the social configuration of residential areas. Since the water came from the west, it first served the western quadrants before being piped towards the eastern region. Therefore, the western section of the city attracted the more affluent members of society while the less fortunate classes were left to occupy the eastern portion of the city. The local government also contributed to the urban improvements. The city council installed gas lamps along major public streets and avenues, introduced modern street signs and the city’s first system of house numbering. The city began slowly developing away from its rural beginnings to a modern city.\textsuperscript{23}

Although the city enjoyed material prosperity, the antebellum period was marked by significant political conflict. Increasing sectional tensions challenged the unity of the nation. Issues concerning slavery, the economy and balance of government power, threatened the preservation of the Union. Faced with these challenges, the federal government sought to strengthen physical symbols of national unity. Therese O’Malley suggested that on the threshold of a civil war, the proposal to ornament the city and establish the Mall as its ceremonial core was a political decision. In unprecedented federal spending, Congress planned to “bolster the image of a unified republican government committed to popular education and a democratic society.”\textsuperscript{24} During this time, there were no other internal improvement projects to landscape
public space on such a monumental scale besides the improvement of the Capitol grounds.

Just as the city was achieving a trajectory towards modernization, the damaging effects of the Civil War had a physical impact on the capital city. Although the preservation of the Union had been assured, the future of the capital city was less certain. The city’s public grounds served as temporary housing of the Union army. Although the infrastructure of the city such as the main avenues and the city canal were in poor conditions, Washington’s prominent architectural and urbanistic features importantly “produced symbols of an ever united country.”

**Constructing the Capitol Building**

The history of the Capitol building and grounds’ early development in many ways reflected the city’s hindered growth. Shifting government interests thwarted the process of the building’s construction. The building was constructed in a succession of phases by a series of architects. Appropriating money to construct the building proved to be a difficult task for the federal government because of the divergent and changing interests of the administration. Congressmen who only temporarily lived in the city for their two-year term, were more concerned for the interests of the citizens of their respective states. Therefore they were less inclined to appropriate large expenditures to construct the Capitol building. Changes in president administrations also affected the process of the building’s construction, as different administrations political programs were more or less inclined to inject money into the project.
The first two architects to contribute their own designs to the Capitol were William Thornton and Benjamin Henry Latrobe. Before the British burned the building in 1812, the Capitol existed as two detached wings. Latrobe restored the building’s two damaged wings, but was replaced by another architect, Charles Bulfinch in 1814. In 1826, Bulfinch completed the domed central section of the building. Bulfinch also designed an earth terrace and landscape plan to complete the “Old Building.” For nearly twenty years, the Capitol building was considered finished. However, as the nation expanded with the admission of new states, the Capitol building would also have to be enlarged to accommodate the growing number of congressmen. Until 1851, the building remained essentially as Bulfinch had completed it. In 1851, Thomas U. Walter was hired to design additional wings to the north and south of the building. By 1869, Walter had completed the additional wings and the new, aggrandized dome. The Capitol extension overshadowed the original building and dramatically altered its physical appearance. This major period of construction had a damaging effect on the Capitol grounds, as they were torn up and acted as a construction site for the extension of building. Until 1872, the grounds had remained within the same boundaries that L’Enfant had delineated in his 1791 plan of the city. Although debates in Congress to expand the grounds had begun as earlier as 1852, it was only with the completion of the building in 1869 that Congress agreed that the grounds needed improvement. Furthermore, it was agreed that the grounds deserved the same professional treatment that the Capitol building had received for nearly a century.
The efforts to improve the grounds always followed a major occurrence in the construction of the building. Architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe first considered the building in relation to the grounds with a landscape scheme in 1814, following the building’s destruction during the War of 1812. Following the building’s completion in 1822, Charles Bulfinch designed an earth terrace for the building’s western front and implemented Latrobe’s landscape scheme. When Congress proposed to expand the building in 1857 after the Mexican war, which increased the size of the nation with the admission of new states, a debate over the expansion of the grounds ensued. After the additional wings were completed in 1869 following the Civil War, the efforts to purchase the necessary property to expand the grounds succeeded in 1872. During the period of reconstruction, Congress realized the necessity of beautifying the city and completing the Capitol site to symbolically and physically validate the reunification of the country.

Frederick Law Olmsted

Professional landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted transformed the Capitol grounds into a national icon. However, the public grounds surrounding the building did not always evoke such a sense of grandeur and reverence. Throughout the construction process, logically, the building was considered precursory to the surrounding grounds. Several of the architects and commissioners throughout the history of the building’s development produced landscape plans for the surrounding grounds. Historically, the Capitol grounds are the product of the many architects, designers, and gardeners whose visions, both realized and unrealized, were publicly
expressed. Pierre L’Enfant’s siting of the grounds on his map of Washington set a precedent for the treatment of the grounds, which many of his successors followed but failed to execute with the same propriety as Olmsted. Olmsted respected L’Enfant’s vision of a symbolic space by articulating the grounds with monumentality and unity, thus reinforcing the power of the federal government and the ideals valued by the nation.

The success of Olmsted’s plan derived from his ability to reconcile these conditions within a unified aesthetic design. Olmsted expressed his concern for the grounds’ visual integration with the Capitol building and the city through specific considerations designed in his plan. Olmsted’s understanding of the grounds as an extension of the building that necessitated unity and harmony with it was unrealized by his predecessors. Unlike the previous designers of the grounds, who were either architects or gardeners, Olmsted’s ability as a landscape designer allowed for the plan’s unique composition that combined formal landscape and informal architectural elements. The formal delineations of the plan which give it its symmetry contrast with the curvilinear nature of the pathways and the informal treatment of the natural elements of the landscape. The synthesis of these contrasting considerations produced a design that drew upon his background as a park designer but adhered to the specific conditions of the grounds as a formal foundation and vestibule for the Capitol building.

Olmsted’s improvements to the grounds were part of a larger campaign to improve the physical conditions of Washington. Over time, the federal government’s failure to make public improvements and the city’s inability to develop commercially,
contributed to the severe environmental degradation of the river basin city.\textsuperscript{27} After the end of the Civil War, it became clear that it was necessary to modernize the city’s essential public services. The city canal served as an unofficial sewer, while the city’s principal street, Pennsylvania Avenue, remained largely unpaved.\textsuperscript{28} While environmental quality quickly became the government’s primary concern for the city, no comprehensive policy existed. The Office of the Commissioner of Public Buildings had held responsibility for the creation and upkeep of public works, buildings and grounds until 1867, when this task was transferred to the United States Army Corps of Engineers. In 1871, the city created a Board of Public Works to specifically handle municipal improvements. The board, which existed as an independent entity from the territorial government, reported directly to Congress and was advised by architects, engineers, and landscape designers, including Frederick Law Olmsted.\textsuperscript{29}

Olmsted’s contribution to the urban landscape had been preceded by earlier attempts to improve the public grounds. Public space was an integral element of L’Enfant’s plan of 1791 which called for various open public squares connected by diagonal avenues. Most notably, he allocated land extending west from the Capitol to where the Washington monument is now located, and north to Lafayette Square, for what is now known as the National Mall. He intended that the network of avenues be seen as linear green spaces that connected and extended the open public squares.\textsuperscript{30} However, L’Enfant’s vision of a unified public space was not implemented immediately, but was succeeded by a series of attempts at landscaping the public
grounds, which included Andrew Jackson Downing’s unfinished treatment for the Mall.

The Capitol project was a new kind of project for Olmsted. It was his first project for the federal government and his first landscape that involved creating a setting for a major building. Prior to this, Olmsted had considered architectural features as subsidiary to the landscape. The success of his first major public commission in 1858, Central Park, relied on creating a picturesque landscape by accentuating natural features and withholding from the overuse of architectural elements.\(^{31}\) The Capitol project was also his first independent commission, because he had dissolved his partnership with Calvert Vaux in 1872. Most importantly, the project served as a chance for Olmsted to contribute to nation’s greatest public works project.\(^{32}\)

**Literature Review:**

Despite the significance of the commission to both Olmsted and the United States, the Capitol grounds have received little attention from historians compared to the building itself and Olmsted’s other projects. While historians of the Capitol have acknowledged the importance of the evolution of the grounds as a crucial period in the history of the Capitol building, Olmsted historians have brought less attention to this commission. In the authoritative texts on the history of the Capitol building’s construction, historians assess Olmsted’s contribution to the improvement of the Capitol grounds as crucial to the evolution of the Capitol site as an artistic, cohesive ensemble.
The first major text on the history of the Capitol building’s construction was Glenn Brown’s *History of the United States Capitol*, published in 1902. He was considered an authoritative source on the building, though Wells Bennet and Fiske Kimball later challenged the accuracy and objectivity of his work. In 1998 William Bushong published an annotated edition of Glenn’s history entitled *Glenn Brown’s History of the United States Capitol* in which he provides an updated bibliography and annotations. Brown dedicated an entire chapter to Olmsted’s work on the grounds, entitled “The Terraces and Landscape Work.” Brown begins his brief history of the grounds with Thomas U. Walter’s 1864 scheme for landscape work on the grounds, which leads into a discussion of Olmsted’s design. The chapter does not include an earlier history of the grounds because it has been situated chronologically into the larger history of the Capitol building. Instead, Brown disperses the history of the grounds chronologically into the appropriate chapters. However, Brown’s narrative of the evolution of the grounds from Walter to Olmsted’s plan is largely pictorial and greatly abbreviated.

Brown’s history has since been superseded by William Allen’s *History of the United States Capitol: A Chronicle of Design, Construction and Politics*, published in 2005, which provides a more thorough and accurate account of both the politics surrounding the project and the evolution of its landscape design. Allen situates the story of the Capitol grounds within a chapter that is dedicated to the ornamentation of and additions to the building, including the terrace and library. Allen’s chapter on the grounds is the most comprehensive historical account that includes both a brief history of the commission and Olmsted’s involvement with the grounds. However,
Allen does not provide a history of the grounds as a site. While he mentions the existing conditions of the grounds in earlier chapters, like Brown, he restricts his in-depth discussion of the grounds to the period which falls chronologically into the chapter. Like Brown, Allen’s chapter is mainly restricted to the years between 1865 and 1902, in which Edward Clark served as architect of the Capitol. His narrative of this period is limited mainly to the artistic and additional features which were added to the building at this time. However, Allen does not completely limit his discussion to this definitive period. In his discourse on the grounds, he includes a critical period in their development, which occurred before 1865. He includes an abridged explanation of the contention within Congress over the improvement of the grounds between 1857 and 1865. While he briefly explains Olmsted’s design, Allen’s history of the grounds is more centered on the legislative history of the commission and the construction of the grounds, as distinct from an in-depth study of Olmsted’s process of design.34

The most comprehensive account of the legislative history involved in the creation of the Capitol is the *Documentary History of the Construction and Development of the United States Capitol*, published in 1904. In a chapter on the legislative history of the Capitol grounds, from 1815 to 1884, this collection includes Senate and House proceedings, reports from the Architect, Secretary of Interior and Commissioner of Public buildings, and bills that provided appropriations for the grounds. This volume is a collection of primary source documents relating to the construction of the Capitol. It devotes an entire chapter to the legislative history concerning the Capitol grounds, which spans the years between 1815 and 1884. The
The document presents legislative history concerning the Capitol grounds, which included Senate and House proceedings, reports from the Architect, Secretary of Interior, and Commissioner of Public Buildings, and bills that provided appropriation for the grounds.  

The only published analysis of the Capitol project is Elizabeth Kathryn Meyer’s 1984 masters thesis, “The United States Capitol Grounds: Preservation of an Olmsted Landscape.” Meyer’s main purpose in analyzing Olmsted’s design and history of the grounds is to provide a study for an appropriate preservation plan for the Capitol grounds. Meyer places Olmsted’s contribution into the greater history of the development of the grounds and analyzes its later development of in the twentieth century. She only briefly outlines the prior physical evolution of the site, and does not address the political history. Her aim is to explain a rationale for a preservation plan that is based on Olmsted’s original design intentions.

Olmsted historians have offered a range of interpretations of their perceived importance of the Capitol grounds in relation to Olmsted’s life and body of work. Historians have favored Central Park as Olmsted’s most influential and lasting legacy, and have written numerous histories dedicated to the park. These texts, such as Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar’s The Park and The People, focus solely on Olmsted’s contribution to Central Park, focusing primarily on its social and political implications. One of the earliest histories of Olmsted was Theodora Kimball and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.’s biography, Frederick Law Olmsted, Landscape Architect, 1822-1902, first published in 1922. Although Kimball provides a rich source of primary documents, her biography of the landscape architect solely focuses
on Central Park, and his earlier life that informed this work. She states that she has chosen to focus on the Olmsted papers relating to Central Park, his first professional undertaking, because of the extent of related material on the project compared to any other project. She claims that this is justifiable because many of the reports from later projects “repeat and develop principles first stated in connection with the park.”

In the biographies written on Olmsted that do address the Capitol grounds, historians vary in depth of their accounts of the project. Melvin Kalfus’ biography, *Frederick Law Olmsted, Life of a Public Artist*, published in 1990, concentrates almost primarily on Olmsted’s public commissioners. Kalfus focuses on how his personal relationships shaped his later career, presenting almost a psychoanalysis of Olmsted. However, Kalfus only alludes to Olmsted’s work at the Capitol, despite its national significance as a public work. Kalfus only mentions the Capitol grounds twice throughout the biography, once in passing and once in relation to Andrew Jackson Downing. In Elizabeth Stevenson’s *Park Maker: A Life of Frederick Law Olmsted*, published in 1977, she also presents a more personal portrait of Olmsted. Throughout her detailed account of Olmsted’s life, she tends to focus more on Olmsted’s personal life than his achievements. Stevenson weaves the Capitol grounds into the story of his personal life throughout the biography, but only in the project’s connection to Olmsted’s personal acquaintances. She gives a brief description of the elements of the plan such as the terrace and necessity of grading and planting trees, but again she relates these details in an effort to make references to Olmsted’s personal correspondence. Stevenson fails to discuss the design and its effect, and attributes neither national nor personal significance to the project.
Other authoritative biographies that present fuller, yet still relatively brief considerations of the Capitol grounds, tend to portray the story in similar ways. The most detailed account of both the history and Olmsted’s work at the Capitol grounds is in Laura Wood Roper’s biography, *FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted*, published in 1973. Roper’s biography is widely considered the most comprehensive study on Olmsted. Roper offers a thorough discussion of Olmsted’s personal life, social philosophies and careers while presenting her subject against the whole background of his time. Roper’s biography is both detailed yet broad in scope. Her consideration of the Capitol grounds illustrates the scope of his professional work in the early 1870’s. She thoroughly explains the context of Olmsted’s commission by comparing the degrees of care given to the building and the grounds. She provides insight into the grounds neglected condition at the time when Olmsted was commissioned and gives an overview of the physical changes that the grounds endured over time. Roper also includes Olmsted’s initial impression of both the grounds and the landscape of Washington. She presents the Capitol project as uniquely different in its purpose and conditions from Olmsted’s other landscape work. She also describes specific design decisions and trees. Compared to any other Olmsted authority, Roper integrates the Capitol grounds into the history of Olmsted’s life and career and provides a sufficient yet abbreviated narrative of the commission, construction and design.

Justin Martin’s *Genius of Place: The Life of Frederick Law Olmsted*, published in 2011 and Witold Rybczynski’s *Clearing in the Distance: Frederick Law Olmsted and America in the 19th Century*, published in 1999, provide similar accounts
of the Capitol grounds. While less detailed than Roper, both attribute the project as affirmations of their success. Martin states that it was exactly the kind of “high profile project he’d been seeking,” while Rybczynki claims that it affirmed his status as the preeminent landscape architect in the country. Both Martin and Rybczynki focus less on the historical precedent set at the grounds, and more on the context of the commission itself. However, Martin’s discussion of the grounds is longer and provides a more detailed explanation of the problem presented by the site and Olmsted’s solutions. Both historians present an understanding of how the particulars of Olmsted’s design provided a much needed solution.

I will argue that Congress had two central motives in commissioning a professional landscape architect to implement a formal plan of improvement for the Capitol grounds in 1873. First, the completion of the Capitol extension in 1867 drew attention to the inadequate condition of the grounds. The poor physical appearance of the grounds, which were littered with remnants of construction, undermined the grandeur of the Capitol building. The completion of the building allowed congressional funds to be directed towards the improvement of the grounds. However, the building had already cost 8.1 million dollars after nearly a century of construction, and the prospect of additional expenditures for the purpose of ornamenting the building seemed frivolous to many. In addition, the project coincided with the Panic of 1873, which was largely caused by the federal government’s investment in the internal improvements such as railroads. The public largely blamed the Republican Party because it promoted the economic conditions that resulted in the
panic. However, the Republican rhetoric of internal improvements also provided hope for of economic salvation for the public.  

Secondly, the existing condition of the grounds had a profoundly negative effect on both the visual and symbolic impression of the Capitol building. Congress’s inability to decide on and execute a plan after years of deliberation suggested poor government functioning and a lack of dedication to the city. In addition, their physical appearance outwardly suggested a lack of unity between the grounds and the building that gave viewers an impression of political and national disunity. Many questioned Washington’s future as the nation’s capital after the Civil War, particularly because of its deplorable physical conditions that undermined the economic success, visual effect, and symbolic implications of the city. Thus, in an effort that reflected the federal government national self-awareness, the government asserted that it needed to legitimize its authority and create the allusion of unity in an effort to both reconstruct the government itself and the capital city. Olmsted’s treatment of the Capitol grounds intended to reestablish the symbolic power of the government and instill a sense of national unity.

In chapter one, I will provide a historical overview of the physical site of the grounds as it evolved throughout the construction of the Capitol building. By discussing the intentions and recommendations of the individual contributors, I will present the development of the grounds as the result of two hundred years of improvements by designers and architects whose plans often responded to or rejected those of their predecessors. Beginning with Pierre L’Enfant’s plan for the city of Washington as the determining location for the Capitol building and the grounds, I
will establish his intentions for the grounds as part of a larger vision for the city of Washington which reflected the political and nationalistic intentions that the founding fathers had for the city.

Next, I will analyze how early architects of the Capitol such as William Thornton and Benjamin Latrobe approached the treatment of the grounds, which existed principally in the form of plans on paper until 1815. By analyzing how these early architects respond to L’Enfant’s plan, I will uncover how idealistic visions confronted the realities of building a capital city from the ground up. I will then discuss the improvements made by Charles Bulfinch, the architect who succeeded Latrobe in 1818 and in 1826, implemented the first landscape scheme that included a terrace at the Capitol grounds.

Lastly, I will examine architect Thomas U. Walter’s proposed enlargement of the grounds, which was prompted by the corresponding work on the expansion of the Capitol building. Although Walter designed an alternative landscape scheme for the grounds, it was not implemented and Walter only extended Bulfinch’s terrace to conform to the new proportions of the building. Walter’s completion of the building inaugurated a debate within Congress over the expansion and improvement of the grounds, which served as a critical step in the evolution of the ground’s development.

In chapter two, I will address the nation’s political history that influenced and informed the legislative history that controlled the development of the Capitol grounds. The two periods of debate over the expansion of the grounds coincide with contentious periods within both Congress and the nation. In examining the shifting political programs and interests of the federal government throughout this contentious
period in Congress, I will uncover the political and social factors of both individual Congressmen and political parties influenced the decision to invest in the improvement of the grounds.

In chapter three, I will introduce Frederick Law Olmsted, who becomes the principal patron in the next phase of the history of the Capitol grounds. I will explain why I believe Congress chose Olmsted, which I will attribute to not only his expertise as a landscape designer, but also to his success as an administrator at both Central Park in New York and the U.S Sanitary Commission in Washington, D.C. I will explain how Senator Justin Morrill became the principal advocate of the improvement of the grounds. It was Morrill who hired Olmsted, and acted as his liaison between the designer and Congress. I will reveal how their shared republican values and their monumental visions of the city made them an ideal partnership.

In chapter four, I will examine Olmsted’s plan as a formal design. I will examine how Olmsted manipulated the landscape in order to enhance the visual impression of the Capitol building. I will explain Olmsted was able to create an ideal setting for the building, which responded to the symbolic intentions of the building. I will examine the problems that Olmsted identified with the existing arrangement and presentation of the building and how his design provided appropriate solutions. I will analyze the elements of his plan, which individually and collectively inform his design theory.

Over the past century since the implementation of Olmsted’s original design, the Capitol grounds have undergone both inadvertent and intentional change. The
area of the grounds have grown from their original 58 acres to cover approximately 274 acres of land. Between 1910 and 1935, 61.4 acres were added north of Constitution Avenue and approximately 100 acres were added in subsequent years.\textsuperscript{42} The integrity of Olmsted’s landscape itself has remained relatively unchanged for nearly a century. However in recent decades, the need for increased security measures prompted the installation of barriers and security stations at vehicular entrances. Over time, unoriginal decorative plantings and flowers have been added which detract from the simplicity of Olmsted’s original design. The carefully planted panels that Olmsted planned for the southeast side are now planted with decorative yet distracting holly and angular crape myrtle, or bright red cannas.\textsuperscript{43} In addition, the construction of an underground visitor’s center on the east side of the Capitol grounds has brought changes to this section of Olmsted’s design. While the 580,000 square foot complex, begun in 2001 and completed in 2008 to promote visitor accessibility, is located underground so that it does not distract from the appearance of the Capitol and interfere with the design of the grounds. However, its construction process has inadvertently caused changes in the appearance of the west grounds that include the addition of skylights in the plaza and the replacement of tulip poplar allées with two sloped lines of trees along descending stairs leading to the entrance of the visitor’s center.\textsuperscript{44} Fortunately, the integrity and overall effect of Olmsted’s grounds remain so that current and future visitors may see the landscape in a way that most closely resembles its original state.

In the context of its time, the conception and design of the Capitol grounds represented a shift from the simplistic treatment that characterized public space in the
nineteenth century. Although the public appreciated public grounds and gardens, the Capitol grounds would appear to be very different from what the city had grown accustomed to. Although the grounds functioned as a park, its main purpose was to serve as a transitional space. Following the ideology of L’Enfant’s urban plan, the grounds would mirror the access and movement characterized by the city’s distinguished streets. In addition to providing the building with a harmonious surrounding, Olmsted attempted to introduce a design that responded to the monumental urban design. However, the urban plan of the city would not be fully realized until after Olmsted’s death, it is evident that his visions extended beyond his concerns for the grounds.
Chapter I. – Historical Trajectory of the Capitol Site

Nothing can be more admirably adapted for the purpose; nature has done much for it, and with the aid of art, it will become the wonder of the world.\textsuperscript{45} -- William Loughton Smith

While the designated location of the Capitol site has remained unchanged since its appearance in French designer Pierre L’Enfant’s 1791 plan of Washington, the physical site itself underwent significant evolution throughout the course of the Capitol building’s construction. L’Enfant’s 1791 plan reflected his intentions for the Capitol site in relation to the city. However, in 1792, Andrew Ellicott reproduced L’Enfant’s plan with small, yet significant changes to the siting of the Capitol building. When Ellicott’s 1792 plan became the official plan of the city, the placement of the Capitol buildings and its grounds conformed to this plan.

Subsequent site plans for the Capitol building reflect a divergence from L’Enfant’s intentions for the Capitol grounds. Until 1818, renderings of a landscape design for the surrounding grounds only existed on paper. In 1803, under the first architect of the Capitol, William Thornton, a site plan was made that depicted the boundaries and spatial organization of the grounds. In wasn’t until 1818 that architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe first depicted the Capitol building in relation to its surrounding grounds as a landscaped space. And it wasn’t until 1826 that the architect Charles Bulfinch first implemented a scheme for the grounds onto the site.
In this chapter, I will provide a history of the evolution of the Capitol site. I will examine the early plans for the Capitol grounds, from L’Enfant’s original 1791 plan through Charles Bulfinch’s from 1826. I will analyze how the plans have evolved, specifically focusing on the ways in which they digressed and conformed to L’Enfant’s intentions. I will provide a parallel history of the ongoing construction on the building throughout this period of time. I will also illustrate how the site physically changed as the building was being constructed.

Pierre Charles L’Enfant:

At some point prior to January of 1791, President George Washington enlisted Pierre Charles L’Enfant’s assistance in planning the new federal city. L’Enfant was certainly a suitable man for the job. The Frenchman was a trained architect and engineer who had also fought on the American side against the British during the Revolutionary War. He had practiced architecture in New York, where in 1788 he designed a temporary building for a Federalist pageant celebrating the ratification of the Constitution. In 1788-89, he planned the remodeling of New York’s City Hall, which also served as the country’s first Capitol building and the site of President Washington’s inauguration.46

One of L’Enfant’s duties was to evaluate the topography of the site on the Potomac River projected for the capital city, in order to determine the most desirable locations for the major government buildings. In a letter written to the Commissioners of the Federal District, Thomas Jefferson vouched for L’Enfant as “peculiarly qualified to make such a Draught of the Grounds as will enable himself to fix on the
Spot for the public Buildings; he has been written to for that purpose.”47 While we now remember L’Enfant for his visionary plan of the city, his original task was comparatively simple. Jefferson, with Washington’s approval, instructed L’Enfant to survey the one hundred square miles along the Potomac River between “Rock Creek, bordering Georgetown, and the mouth of the Eastern Branch, more than three miles southeast” to identify a suitable site for the city.48 (Fig. 2) Jefferson described L’Enfant’s assignment: “the special object of asking your aid is to have drawings of the particular grounds most likely to be approved for the site of the federal town and buildings.”49 In addition to L’Enfant’s service, President Washington had hired another surveyor, Andrew Ellicott, to make a survey and map of the federal territory.

Although Jefferson had instructed L’Enfant only to provide “aid” in the form of “drawings,” L’Enfant wanted to go further and he consequently developed his own visionary plan for the capital city. L’Enfant had his own intentions for the federal city and consequently developed his own visionary plan for the capital city. L’Enfant’s first task was to examine the prospective landscape at first hand. He would later report that in order “to obtain a knowledge of the whole I put from the Eastern Branch towards Georgetown up the heights and down along side of the bank of the main river and along side of Goose and Rock creeks as far up as their springs.”50 While his convoluted description reveals little about the course of his survey, it does give the sense that L’Enfant intended to cover every inch of ground in one day. Wedged between the divergence of the Potomac and the Easter branch, the landscape L’Enfant surveyed offered considerable variety:
Fields of tobacco and corn, small forests of maple and black cherry and tulip poplar, waterside bluffs and patches of tidal marsh… capping this area to the north was a five-mile-wide arc of higher, more broken ground, out of which flowed dozens of small springs that joined and widened into creeks, before spilling into the Potomac and the Eastern Branch, en route to the Chesapeake Bay a hundred miles to the southeast.51

The rendering of Washington in a drawing from 1801 attests to its rural and picturesque characterizations. (Fig. 3) Hills and waterways shaped and dominated the geography of the area. Forming a wide shallow inlet where it met the Potomac, Goose Creek, also known as the Tiber, bisected the future site of the city. The Tiber became an important feature in L’Enfant’s conception of his plan, as every major topographical element that he would eventually utilize related directly to the tributary. The triangle of lower, more level ground to the south formed the framework of what would become the Mall. The series of gently ascending bluffs and terraces would become the site of the President’s House. However, the most significant feature in L’Enfant’s plan was the “spot one and half miles east of the Potomac where the Tiber narrowed to become a series of springs falling from a wide, prominent rise in the land,” known as Jenkins Hill.52 The site was located two miles southeast of Rock Creek and a mile north of the Eastern Branch. The rounded crest of Jenkins Hill sloped gently southward down to the Eastern Branch, while its westernmost edge shifted more dramatically in elevation.

L’Enfant identified sites for major public buildings so as to exploit the natural topography to its fullest extent. In his first report, he explained that “my whole
attention was directed to a combination of the general distribution of the several situations, and object which, being of almost immediate moment, and importance, made me sacrifice every other consideration.” In his reports to Washington, L’Enfant repeatedly called attention to the “effects” of the landscape that could be “artfully managed.” He wrote

There were the level ground on the water and all round were it descend but most particularly on that part terminating in a ridge to Jenkins Hill and running in a parallel with and at half mile off from the river Potowmack separated by a low ground intersected with three grand streams may offer the most desirable position offer for to Erect the Publique Edifices thereon –from these heights every grand building would rear with a majestied aspect over the Country all around and might be advantageously seen from twenty miles off. L’Enfant’s siting of important buildings in his design reflected his concern with prospects and vistas. “From [the] heights every grand building would rear with a majestic aspect over the country all around and might be advantageously seen from twenty miles off,” he predicted. L’Enfant recognized the visual advantages of placing important public buildings on eminences, which would allow views both to and from the building.

L’Enfant also asked Thomas Jefferson to provide him with maps of “grand” cities such as London, Madrid, Paris, Amsterdam, Naples, Venice, Genoa and Florence. J.L Sibley Jennings Jr. proposes that L’Enfant recognized that the Potomac site shared climate, vegetation and topography with southern Europe. Jennings explains that in the “hot and arid south, vegetation has more tenuous
existence, turf is not natural, and horticulture is used to ornament architectural effects. Regularly spaced trees, patterned paving, sculpture and water-as sculpture, are all deliberately placed to accentuate those effects.” Jennings points out that of the eight cities of which L’Enfant had maps, five were located in southern Europe and that the form of two of the remaining cities, London and Paris, was influenced by southern European precedents. 57

L’Enfant was the son of a French court painter. He also thought of himself as an artist and he considered his relationship with George Washington to be that of artist to patron. During the war, he had painted the portrait of the future president and Washington also commissioned him to design an eagle insignia for the hereditary organization of officers known as the Society of the Cincinnati. L’Enfant’s city plan reflected his aesthetic interest in the picturesque potential of the setting in which the city, and specifically the buildings would lie. 58 In fact, his initial report to Washington and Jefferson indicates that L’Enfant had interpreted his assignment principally as “that of selecting picturesque sites.” The following passage from his initial reports affirms his aesthetic motives:

From [the] heights every grand building would rear with a majestic aspect over the country all around and might be advantageously seen from twenty miles off… [From] the first settlement of the City they would stand to ages in a central point to it, facing on the grandest prospect of both… branches of the Potomac with the town of Alexandria in front, seen in its full extent over many pints of land projecting from the Maryland and Virginia shores in a manner as adds much to the perspective, at the end of which the Cape of
Hunting Creek appears directly where a corner stone of the Federal District to be placed and in the room of which a majestic column or grand pyramid being erected would produce the happiest effect and completely finish the landscape.\textsuperscript{59}

L’Enfant envisioned his plan from the ground up. His plan was drawn in two dimensions, but it was conceived in three dimensions for visual effect. Jennings suggested that the plan’s “built-in asymmetry, sudden surprises, controlled monumentality, and ever changing picturesque vistas to give delight and pleasure”\textsuperscript{60} gave it its artistic sensibility.

L’Enfant’s original design for the city of Washington combined a utilitarian grid plan with a system of grand diagonal avenues radiating from two principal focal points, the President’s House and the Capitol building. (Fig. 4) In the margin notations of his 1791 plan, L’Enfant explained that he derived his design by first determining the most advantageous ground on which to site the important public buildings and grand public squares. He then connected these important sites with rectilinear streets, making the “distribution regular with every street at right angles.” In his report to President Washington, he explained that he configured the streets “in different directions, as avenues to and from every principal place.” Laying out the city in this way allowed for visual relationships and direct connections between important spaces and buildings. It also created axial vistas that gave the impression of a compact city.\textsuperscript{61} The plan’s notes also affirmed L’Enfant’s rationale for the configuration of radial avenues, which sought to “connect the separate and most distant objects with the principal, and to preserve through the whole a reciprocity of
sight at the same time.” Physically and symbolically, the system would connect the
dispersed state settlements by “demonstrating their unity with the Federal center and
each other.”*62

L’Enfant’s intentions are clearly demonstrated in his design for the federal
precinct, which can be more clearly seen in this detail of his map. (Fig. 5) L’Enfant
placed the Capitol building in the center of the city at the highest elevation on the
western end of Jenkins Hill, with views of the surrounding city and landscape in
every direction. This 1871 birds eye image from of the Capitol gives an idea of the
extent of the views from the building of the surrounding landscape. (Fig. 6) L’Enfant
intended for the Capitol building to dominate the views of the city, as seen in this
photograph from 1870, which attests to the prominence of the building in the urban
landscape. (Fig. 7) L’Enfant saw that Jenkins Hill, which was located on the eastern
edge of the tidal flats formed by the convergence of the Potomac and Anacostia
rivers, “stands really as a pedestal waiting for a superstructure.” Because of its
exceptional visual prominence in and view of the landscape, L’Enfant regarded this
as the most appropriate site for the most important building in the new capital city. In
his report to President Washington, he wrote:

After a minute search for other eligible situations, I may assert without
apprehension of appearing prejudiced in favor of a first opinion, that I could
not discover one in all respects so advantageous… for erecting the Federal
House [as] the western end of Jenkins Heights which stands as a pedestal
waiting for a superstructure and I am confident were all the ground cleared of
wood, no other situation could bear competition with this.*63
L’Enfant also allocated areas for the public spaces that surrounded the President’s House and placed public squares throughout the city. These spaces, which included “green spaces, waterways, and architectural elements,” would reinforce the relationships between important sites established by the street plan. The “Grand Avenue,” later known as the National Mall, was a formally delineated green space that was flanked with “gardens” and “houses.” It was to be four hundred feet wide and a mile long, stretching west from the Capitol to the Potomac River. This large green space would connect the smaller green spaces such as the “Congress Garden” with the “President’s park.” Another green axis intersected the Mall at a site allocated for an equestrian statue of George Washington. Originating at the President’s House, this space extended south and perpendicular to the Mall. This detail of L’Enfant’s map shows the intended to connect the federal precinct with green spaces, which are highlighted in yellow. (Fig. 8) It is evident that L’Enfant conceived these spaces as integral elements in his plan because he proposed these spaces as the major axis of the city rather than situating the city around commercial streets.

While L’Enfant did not include a plan for the Capitol building per se, his map indicated that he had specific intentions about the space surrounding such a structure. As shown in the detail of the Capitol site, he considered the west approach to the building by placing two public walkways “through which carriages may ascend to the upper square of the Federal house,” marked G on the map. (Fig. 9) These walkways would pass through four gatehouses, which were situated on three sectioned green spaces. These four green spaces were articulated like city blocks and situated so that
the public walkways passed through them. He also proposed a “Grand Cascade,” a falls forty feet high and one hundred feet wide formed of water flowing from the Tiber River under the western base of the Capitol. Labeled F on the map, this cascade would intersect the Tiber Canal, which ran parallel and north of the Mall.

Although L’Enfant did not use a figural representation of the building to indicate its location on the map, he wrote the words “Congress House” to signify the placement of the building, labeled L on the map. It is significant to note that L’Enfant placed the Capitol to the east of the intersection of North, South, and East capitol Streets, and the Mall axis, as it suggests that he intended the entirety of the space west of the intersection for the Capitol grounds. He wrote that the Congress garden was to be “a Public Walk, a square of 1200 feet, through which carriages may ascend to the upper square of the Federal house.” On L’Enfant’s map, this area is square in shape suggesting that he was not using “square” to mean a plaza but rather the actual shape of the square. He specifically writes that one does not ascend to the Capitol, but rather, to the upper square of the Capitol. Because L’Enfant placed the square to the west of the Capitol, it is apparent that he intended the west front to be its principal entrance.

The commissioners also instructed L’Enfant to prepare plans for the principal buildings while the surveyor, Andrew Ellicott, was in charge of the process of laying down the city on the ground. However, there was still the need for a complete copy of the plan for the engraving process so that it could be distributed and presented to the public. L’Enfant first contacted the Philadelphia engraver, M. Pigalle to prepare a copper plate to have his plan engraved in time for the initial sale of lots. He also
needed someone to copy the plan and hired French architect Etienne Hallet to draft a copy. Hallet was in the process of making his copy of the plan from L’Enfant’s large, original copy when Pigalle notified L’Enfant that it was not possible to receive the copper plate and engrave it in time for the sale. Later, when the commissioners again urged the necessity of a complete plan, L’Enfant contacted Benjamin Ellicott, brother of Andrew Ellicott, to prepare a copy. Historian Sibley Jennings asserts that no explanation is given as to why L’Enfant did not return to Hallet to complete his copy. Before L’Enfant left Georgetown for Philadelphia to begin the designs of the individual buildings, he provided Benjamin Ellicott with the unfinished Hallet copy rather than the oversized original plan. After some time had passed, L’Enfant heard a rumor that another engraver was in the process of creating a plate for the city’s plan under the direction of Andrew Ellicott. L’Enfant confronted Ellicott at his home, where he found his copy “in the state in which it now is most unmercifully spoiled and altered from the original plan to a degree indeed evidently tending to disgrace me and ridicule the very undertaking.”

When L’Enfant demanded that Ellicott return the Hallet copy along with other drawings so that he could correct the errors, Ellicott refused. It is evident from the exchange of letters between the commissioners, George Washington, Ellicott and L’Enfant that the President, with his complete authority over the process, had only two principal concerns. First, that the plan was to be engraved quickly for distribution to the public to encourage sales and second, that L’Enfant subordinate himself to the commissioners. The popular notion at the time was that L’Enfant had “maliciously withheld the use of his plan.” L’Enfant had written to the Commissioners on February
23, 1792 that “Major L’Enfant refused use the use of his original plan; what his motives were, God knows. The Plan which we have furnished, I believe will be found to answer the grounds better than the large one in the Major’s hands.”

Ellicott’s inability to subject himself to the directions of the commissioners eventually lead to his dismissal. In the days following the L’Enfant’s confrontation with Andrew Ellicott, Tobias Lear wrote to L’Enfant asking him if he would do as the president had commanded and make himself subject to the commissioners. L’Enfant had just written to Thomas Jefferson explaining why he could not subject himself to the directions of the commissioners. While Jennings explains that the details of their exchange are unclear, but whatever it was prompted Washington to say that he had been insulted by L’Enfant and for Jefferson to soon after dismiss the major on behalf of the President.

In Andrew Ellicott’s reproduction of L’Enfant’s map, which became the official map of the city, there are slight changes to both the Capitol site and the President’s House. (Fig. 10) Ellicott drew a figural representation of the Capitol building in the center of the aforementioned intersection, thus changing the original siting of the building and consequently the spatial conception of the grounds. Although the Capitol square is in the same location as it appears in L’Enfant’s map, there are slight changes in regard to the location of the building itself. In this comparison of the two treatments of the site, it is apparent that Ellicott centered the building within the site that L’Enfant had designated, placing it further west than L’Enfant had originally. (Fig. 11) The comparison shows that L’Enfant allocated
more spaces for the grounds on the west of the building, while Ellicott has distributed the space on the east and west of the building equally.

L’Enfant had originally intended the Capitol building to be several hundred yards east of its current position. From L’Enfant’s memos and petitions to Congress, it is evident that the placement of the Capitol and President’s House according to Ellicott’s map was not as he had originally intended. He insisted that both were position too low, “sunk in a declivity.” Ellicott’s failure to situate the Capitol fully on the crest of Jenkins Hill would cause both structural and aesthetic problems for the building in the future. Architects, beginning in the 1820’s would attempt to correct this flaw with grass terraces, but the permanent and most successful solution would not come until landscape designer Frederick Law Olmsted’s terrace was implemented.

The architects, commissioners, and gardeners who followed L’Enfant did not conceive of the Capitol and grounds with so sophisticated and comprehensive an approach. For most of the Capitol building’s early construction, the grounds were first a common then a construction site, not a unified landscape. In 1803, an Englishmen described the view of the Capitol as “a ponderous unfinished mass of bricks and stone… one or two brick buildings with corresponding sheds, half a dozen straggling houses or fragments of houses fill up the view.” For the first two decades of construction on the building, the early architects, namely William Thornton and Benjamin Henry Latrobe ignored the grounds remained in the form of the architect’s site plans. While some congruities exist between the plans of the first three architects
of the Capitol, it is apparent that the consideration of the grounds evolved throughout the building’s construction, further departing from L’Enfant’s original intentions.

Since L’Enfant, who intended to design the Capitol building, had been dismissed before he produced a plan, no plan for the building existed by the spring building season of 1792. With the suggestion of Thomas Jefferson, the Commissioner of Public Buildings, Congress issued an advertisement for a plan. The advertisement called for a modest structure with fifteen rooms and two lobbies, but there was no mention of the architecture or style. While the specifications seemed modest, the building would have been spacious compared to Congress Hall in Philadelphia. Unfortunately, the advertisement brought designs that “more suited for a county courthouses than for the nation’s capitol,” and thus the competition closed in the summer of 1792 without a winning design. However, in January 1873, Dr. William Thornton submitted a design that the President received with high praise.

William Thornton

The first architect of the Capitol was Dr. William Thornton. George Washington hired Thornton after a competition held for a design of the building failed to produce plans considered satisfactory to the commissioners. Thornton, a native of the West Indies, had become a “convinced Republican” and citizen of the United States in early 1788. At the time, Thornton was only an amateur architect, having originally practiced medicine in the West Indian colony of Tortola. After settling in Philadelphia, with the help of his wealth and contacts, Thornton became a fixture of the city’s intellectual life. His friendship with Benjamin Franklin introduced
him to a new interest, mechanical experimentation. However, his efforts during this period of innovation were not purely mechanical. Thornton expressed his interest in the arts in his observation that “the fine arts hardly exist here, and learning is little considered.” Thornton did not see his lack of actual architectural experience as a barrier to submitting a design for the competition of a new building for The Library Company of Philadelphia. The design, largely the product of fervent consultation of architectural design books, won the competition. (Fig. 12)

It was in this context of Thornton’s lack of architectural expertise that George Washington hired trained architect Stephen Hallet, as superintendent to critique Thornton’s design. It appears that the early conception of the Capitol changed frequently as illustrated by the varied designs of the Capitol from this time. A view of another east elevation shows that Thornton had revised the design he submitted for the competition. (Fig. 13) The revised plan consisted of a low domed center section with two identical wings, one for the Senate and one of the House of Representatives. An image of the west elevation shows that there was an additional higher dome on the west side of the building. (Fig. 14) William C. Allen, former architect of the Capitol constructed a three-dimensional model that shows how the Capitol may have been envisioned in 1797. (Fig. 15)

Hallet was charged with constructing the Capitol in accordance to Thornton’s plan. However, Hallet deviated from Thornton’s design and his insubordination led to his dismissal. Washington placed Thornton in charge of the building as one of the Commissioners of the district. Once again in charge, Thornton modified Hallet’s changes to conform to his original design. The need for a capable architect
necessitated the commissioners to hire architect George Hadfield in 1795. However, disagreements between Hadfield and Thornton regarding the specifics of Thornton’s plan lead to Hadfield’s resignation after only a year. Upon Hadfield’s dismissal, the commissioners hired architect of the President’s House and Surveyor of Public Buildings, James Hoban, who had supervised both Hallet and Hadfield. By 1801 under the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, the north wing and a temporary south wing had been completed. This drawing by William C. Allen shows how the Capitol may have appeared in 1804. (Fig. 16)

During the Jefferson administration, the Commissioners spent more than three hundred and seventy thousand dollars on the Capitol, two hundred thousand dollars of which was loaned by the State of Maryland. On January 11, 1802, Jefferson recommended that Congress repay the loan and suggested abolishing the board of commissioners in favor of a single superintendent of the city. By abolishing the board, Jefferson would have power to personally direct future work on the building. It was also under Jefferson that the Capitol received its first appropriation of fifty thousand dollars for the “repairs and alterations in the Capitol… for the accommodation of Congress in their future sessions.” With the federal government’s debt repaid, Congress could appropriate funds from the Treasury for continuing construction on the south wing.

From an 1803 plat of the grounds surrounding the Capitol, it is apparent that boundaries set by L’Enfant and reaffirmed by Ellicott had been clearly established. (Fig. 17) As indicated by the dotted lines of the plat, the t-shaped plot is bounded by B Street on the north and south and First Street on the east and west, with the
exception of two squares on the west, 687 and 688, which lay on the corners of the
intersection of First Street west and B Street north and south, respectively. The
grounds respond to the proposed curvilinear projection of the West front of the
building and the converging radial avenues. Only dotted lines indicate the intended
boundaries and approaches to the building. There are no details of landscape design
other than the delineation of the boundaries.

While the 1803 plat shares similarities with the conception of the Capitol
grounds in both L’Enfant and Ellicott’s maps of Washington, slight differences exist
between the three maps. While L’Enfant designated the public space adjacent to the
Capitol as a full square with the Capitol building to its west, the 1803 plat bears a
closer resemblance to Andrew Ellicott’s spatial allocation. In both the 1803 plat and
Andrew Ellicott’s map, the Capitol building is situated further west, closer to its
western border of First Street. Thus the building is positioned directly in the center of
the Capitol site. Because L’Enfant did not depict the exact citing of the building, we
can only infer from the records of his disappointment that reveal that it was
positioned too far west and not on the true crest of the hill. It is likely that he intended
the building’s location to be at the intersection of Delaware and New Jersey Avenue,
which is where the building appears in both Ellicott and the 1803 plan. Therefore,
L’Enfant’s Capitol building would have also been in the center of the grounds, as he
designated additional space to the east of the intersection.

All three maps conceive the general shape of Capitol site as T-shaped entity
with wider boundaries to the north and south on the western portion of the grounds.
The maps all allude to the omission of squares 687 and 688. While all three maps
reveal a curvilinear treatment in relation to the western side of the building and the west grounds, their treatment of details in the configuration of the western grounds differs. L’Enfant and Ellicott arranged the western grounds, shown in a darker shade, as distinct green spaces in conjunction with the adjacent Mall with two roadway approaches that are inferred from the negative space of the grounds. The 1803 plat outlines the system of approaches from the west as three distinct approaches that stem from the Maryland and Pennsylvania Avenue and a third unnamed street that runs perpendicular to the center of the building. The 1803 plat has also created a distinct system of approaches from all directions of the city that is not designated in the earlier plans of the city. The three avenues from the north, south and west, and the one approach from the east, all merge into a circular drive that encircles the building.

Benjamin Henry Latrobe

In 1803, Jefferson appointed Benjamin Henry Latrobe “surveyor of public buildings” assigned to design and build the south wing of the Capitol. By this time, the British born Latrobe had designed the United States Penitentiary in Richmond, Virginia in 1797, the Bank of Pennsylvania in 1798 and a dry dock for twelve frigates at the Washington Navy Yard in 1802. Like Jefferson, Latrobe also was a member of the American Philosophical Society.81

Latrobe recognized the structural weakness of Thornton’s design and authorized his assistant to “pull up or knockdown” the existing stonework of the south wing to build “my plan” because the faulty stonework in Thornton’s plan was “new proof of the stupid genius of its Author.”82 Because he was often absent from
Washington working on other projects and because he encountered resistance from Thornton, Latrobe did not complete the south wing until 1808. By 1811, he had rebuilt Thornton’s north wing which was plagued with worsening structural problems. Disagreements between the architects led Thornton to sue Latrobe, who left Washington in 1813 to pursue other opportunities.

By 1812, after two decades and the work of four architects, the Capitol consisted of a north and south wing connected by a two-story wooden walkway covering the space intended for a domed rotunda. Despite the twenty years of slow progress, it took only minutes to cause grave destruction. The British occupation of Washington during the War of 1812 left considerable damage to the Capitol building. The fire set by the British destroyed the interior of the Capitol and left the stone “scathed and smutched…and scowling like desolation.”

An engraving from 1814 depicts Latrobe’s two wings and missing central section, after the British burned the building in 1812. (Fig. 18) The engraving also shows how the grounds immediately surrounding the building were barren and littered with materials.

Notwithstanding this trauma, Congress decided to stay in Washington, but questions surrounding about how to restore the damaged public buildings remained. President James Madison appointed a three-man commission to administer loans necessary to rebuild the public buildings. While Congress did not authorize the commission, Madison took it upon himself to follow Washington’s precedent based on the Residence act of 1790. However, the commissioners were acquaintances of Madison, and like the last board, had no experience in architecture or building.

Shortly following the authorization to begin work on repairing the public buildings,
Benjamin Henry Latrobe wrote to Madison offering his services and expressing his desire to continue work on the building he had done so much to create.\(^{54}\)

Latrobe’s first task was assessing the current conditions of the wings. In an undated letter to Thomas Jefferson, he described the damage at the Capitol building. He wrote that despite sections of the Senate wing (north) escaped with little damage, in the House of Representatives the devastation has been dreadful… The whole was soon in a blaze, and so intense was the flame, that the glass… was melted… The stone… is unable to resist the force of flame… the exterior of the columns and entablature… scaled off… The appearance of the ruin was awfully grand…”\(^{55}\)

Once it had been conferred that the walls of the Capitol building were safe and sufficiently strong to be restored, it was determined that it would be more economical to repair the building than to build anew. President Monroe reported that it had cost \$1,215,111\) to build both the Capitol and President’s house and that it would require an estimated \$460,000\) to repair the damage. However, Congress met the decision to repair rather than relocate the Capitol with resistance. Senator Eligius Fromentin of Louisiana advocated his fellow Congressmen to authorize construction of a “large, convenient and unadorned house” located near Georgetown to replace the old Capitol building. The original sites of major government buildings, selected by President Washington, had lost their sanctity because the conditions of the city and nation had changed dramatically.\(^{56}\) The treasury was depleted, prosperity had dissipated and commerce had subsided. However, President Madison’s authorization for a \$500,000
loan to restore the Capitol, President’s House and cabinet offices reaffirmed the government’s faith in Washington and L’Enfant’s vision of the city.

Although the fire destroyed any evidence of pre-existing work on the grounds before 1814, by the end of 1815, the Committee for the District of Columbia had begun their first inquiry into the improvement of Capitol square.\(^{87}\) I suspect that this initiative of securing an appropriation for the “graduating, enclosing, and improving the Capitol square” was in response to the physical devastation but also the demoralization caused by the British invasion.\(^{88}\) The aspiration for defining the site of the Capitol was an attempt to establish both physical and symbolic order to the capital. On April 29, 1816, the Senate and House passed a bill appropriating thirty thousand dollars for the improvement of the public square east of the Capitol. The bill also included a section that authorized the appointment of a single commissioner of public buildings in place of the three-person committee that Madison had created. Madison appointed Samuel Lane as the first commissioner of public buildings, whose duty was to “contract for, and superintend the enclosing and improvements of the public square under the direction of the President of the United States.”\(^{89}\)

In his first letter to the Commissioner of public buildings on February 3, 1817, Lane reported on an estimate in response to the act that made the appropriation. He reported that his first consideration was to “digest a plan combining, with requisite degrees of utility and taste... [and] durability. After determining a plan, its execution was “offered to the competition of the public, and a contact entered into with one of our enterprising citizens.” Further, he explained that while work on the grounds has commenced, it was soon ascertained that the appropriated sum would fall short of the
amount needed to accomplish the work. Lane attributed the deficit in part to the original estimate not covering the entire square. He suggests a new estimate of $45,653.85 to cover the entire square, which left a deficit of $25,653.85.\textsuperscript{90}

While Latrobe was pleased with the change of authority, he longed for the position himself. Before the Senate approved of the legislature, Latrobe wrote to President Madison asking to be named commissioner. He complained that the board, “the most villainous board of Commissioners that ever had the power of tormenting in their heads” had treated him in the most “coarse and offensive” manner.\textsuperscript{91} Latrobe had experienced the difficulties of subordination to nonprofessional authorities who lacked knowledge of building and architecture.

In addition to improving and rebuilding the wings, Latrobe also devised a landscape scheme of the Capitol grounds and Mall. (Fig. 19) Latrobe was the first architect to produce a plan that considered the grounds in relation to the Capitol building. Latrobe expanded on Thornton’s scheme in his site plan from December of 1815. Latrobe’s site plan of 1815 reinforced the boundaries set by Thornton while providing more details of the physical landscape and more context of the surrounding area. Like Thornton’s plan, the west grounds maintain their curvilinear response to the west façade of the building. However, the earlier semi-circular façade has been replaced by a “rectilinear temple front and projecting propylae entrance,” which attempts to ease the transition between the building and the grounds.\textsuperscript{92} (Fig. 20 and 21) In addition, a waterway ending in a dock on the Tiber Canal has replaced the western axis, which had been articulated by an avenue. The entire perimeter of the designated public spaces is lined with a single row of trees line. The east grounds are
bounded to a rectangular space bisected by four rows of trees and bordered by A Streets north and south, lot 687 on the north and 688 on the south. These grounds are separated from the building and the west grounds by a street formed by the convergence of Delaware and New Jersey avenues.

Latrobe’s plan also includes a detailed view of the eastern end of the Mall. The formal treatment of the section of the Mall east of the Tiber Canal contrasts with the natural rendering of the western section. His plan exhibits a picturesque treatment of the landscape as a succession of distinct green spaces. The formality of his treatment is most extreme in the spaces surrounding the Capitol building. In addition to the curvilinear space immediately surrounding the building, green spaces bordered by trees articulate the multiple approaches.

Latrobe’s picturesque design was informed by his familiarity with the American landscape, his interest in landscape painting and his background as a British architect. The picturesque movement was a British creation that developed in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. It was predicated on the concept that the “formal criteria for judging painted compositions, particularly landscape paintings could be transferred to other art forms and works of nature.”  

Latrobe was dedicated to the notion of the picturesque, which is supported by the miscellaneous writings and landscape drawings that he left behind, particularly those in fourteen volumes of sketchbooks that span the years between 1795 and 1820, while employed at the Capitol.

His two volume illustrated manuscript, “Essay on Landscape,” a handbook on picturesque landscape drawing written in 1798-99 is particularly telling. It exhibits
his aesthetic conception of viewing the actual landscape, which he draws from his own experiences. According to Latrobe, the picturesque effect is conceived through contrast and motion through the landscape. In his essay, he wrote: “Having satiated your eye with prospect, retire within the Grove, so that the foreground shall consist of trees, and shadowy earth… this particular effect, of seeing a distant view flittering among near objects is familiar to every observer. The Landscape is now become a perfect composition.”

Latrobe’s plan was also informed by his responsibility for the treatment of the landscape surrounding the President’s House. Latrobe expanded the President’s House in 1802 under Jefferson’s term, where he also designed a plan for the surrounding grounds. Michael W. Fazio and Patrick A. Snadon compare the 1807 design for the President’s house grounds with the 1815 design of the Capitol grounds in their book *The Domestic Architecture of Benjamin Henry Latrobe*. While the plan, which is unsigned, is often credited to Thomas Jefferson, Jeffrey Cohen and Charles Brownell argue that Latrobe is the author based on a letter to Jefferson of April 29, 1807, in which Latrobe wrote that he intended to submit a “new plan” to replace an earlier design for the south grounds in which “a semicircle was struck to the South from the Center of the Bow of the House.” In a letter to Jefferson on April 29, 1807, Latrobe writes that he intended to submit a “new plan” to replace an earlier design for the south grounds in which “a semicircle was struck to the South from the Center of the Bow of the House.” At the north side of his design, the radiating streets become tree-lined allées that converge at the center of the house and intersect the serpentine pathways. The tree-lined street is a fundamental element of the 1815
plan for the Capitol grounds. Less information can be ascertained from Latrobe’s 1815 plan because as it only provides a general scheme of the landscape, and is not a study.

The appropriation covered the costs of enclosing the Capitol grounds and grading the surface of the ground. The Committee on Public Buildings and the Commissioner also decided to revert to the original design of the City” which they deemed would “be more satisfactory to the public.” The committee was referring to the original site plan from 1803, in which the grounds were extended around a semi-circular area around the west of the building. This plan differed from Latrobe’s design in that it omitted the propylaea entrance and interior wall in front of the west side of the building.

Having failed to restore the Capitol quickly, Latrobe resigned from his duties at the Capitol on November 24, 1817. He was the only architect to leave a significant architectural legacy there. His initial duty was to repair the wings and produce designs for the remainder of the building. However, but he went further by changing the form, design, and details of the interior of the south wing, though Thornton’s plan was preserved in the north wing. Latrobe also changed the design for the eastern portico by introducing a grand flight of steps, which gave primacy to the eastern entrance to the building. The remainder of Latrobe’s designs were implemented, and in some cases altered by his successor, Charles Bulfinch.
Well before Latrobe officially resigned from his duties at the Capitol, William Lee, an auditor in the Treasury, friend of Latrobe, and confidant of President Monroe, wrote to Charles Bulfinch advising him to apply for the position. Bulfinch refused to consider the position while Latrobe was still in office, but once Latrobe had resigned, the Commissioner of Public Buildings, Samuel Lane instructed Nehemiah Freeman of Boston to hire Bulfinch. In an effort to establish his authority and assert their relative positions, Lane wanted to remind the architect that the “appointment is entirely at the disposal of the Commissioner.”

Charles Bulfinch’s political connections and architectural repertoire made him a perfect candidate for the position. In his native Boston, he served as chairman of the board of selectmen for twenty years. Bulfinch also designed two hospitals in Boston as part of a public improvements program after the War of 1812. However, it was Bulfinch’s friendship with President Monroe that sealed his appointment as architect of the Capitol. While on a research tour of medical facilities in New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore, Bulfinch visited Washington, where a former Senator from Massachusetts introduced him to Monroe. During his trip to Washington, Bulfinch’s political connections allowed him to make personal acquaintances with the Commissioner of Public Buildings among other influential figures. Six months later, when President Monroe visited Boston, Bulfinch personally received him as chairman of the selectmen.

On December 11, 1817, Charles Bulfinch replaced Latrobe as architect of the Capitol. He was first assigned to complete the wings that had been partially restored
by Latrobe and to construct the central building with the dome according to Latrobe’s plans.\textsuperscript{102} However, Bulfinch made significant design changes to the western portico, the original dome and treatment of the Capitol grounds.

Bulfinch had a four-foot model of the Capitol largely prepared which exhibited “the different facades that have been prepared by Dr. Thornton and Mr. Latrobe, just a section of the rotunda and dome” so that the president and Congress could “select the one that on all considerations shall promise best.”\textsuperscript{103} On April 20, 1818, Congress allocated $100,000 and approved Bulfinch’s changes. By the end of 1822, after twenty-nine years of construction, the two wings were joined by the completed central portion of the building and it could finally be said that the United States had a proper Capitol. This model shows how the completed Capitol with its new dome and central section appeared in 1826. (Fig. 22) By 1824, the interior with the exception of some painting on the stonework and ornaments for the rotunda was finished.\textsuperscript{104}

With the building essentially complete, Bulfinch then turned to landscaping the grounds after 1826. While Latrobe had devised a landscape scheme for the grounds nearly ten years earlier, it wasn’t until Bulfinch completed the building that he implemented Latrobe’s scheme. (Fig. 23) It is evident that Bulfinch’s inherited Latrobe’s earlier plan because of the general congruity between the schemes. Like Latrobe’s plan, Bulfinch conceived the grounds in relation to the east end of the Mall, which would have been a Botanic Garden at the time. In both Latrobe and Bulfinch’s plan, trees line the divided sections of the grounds and allées form the approach from the west. Both plans similarly conceived the Capitol grounds in a fragmented way.
Major streets, A Street north and south and the curvilinear western drive which border the grounds comprise the immediate boundaries of the building, separate the grounds surrounding the building from the landscaped sections that articulate the approaches from the north and south.

Most apparent is the separation between the eastern and western portions of the grounds. In both Latrobe and Bulfinch’s site plans and a plate of the grounds from 1830 illustrate the detachment between the two sections. (Fig. 24) A large courtyard on the east side of the building that spanned the width of the Capitol site bisected the grounds from the north to the south, providing direct access to the building. This fragmentation of the grounds by a transverse access way is not depicted in either Ellicott or L’Enfant’s plan. Like the 1803 plat, the 1830 plat depicts the formality in which the grounds were conceived. As in the 1803 plat, in the 1830 plat the eastern grounds are divided into three equal sized rectangular plots, while the westerns grounds are treated in a different manner. The monumentality originally suggested by L’Enfant and emulated in the 1803 plat is minimized by the treatment of the western approaches in the 1830 plat. The three approaches have diminished in width to mere sidewalks with the central approach defined by narrow divisions of the grounds.

The initial improvement to the grounds had begun before Bulfinch’s arrival in Washington. In 1816, Congress appropriated $30,000 dollars to enclose and improve the public square on the east side of the Capitol. Between 1817 and 1826, Congress had approved of small appropriations not exceeding $3,000 to graduate the grounds and improve the general appearance of the grounds.105 On January 26, 1826, Commissioner of Public buildings Joseph Elgar reported to Congress:
The ground around the Capitol have been so encumbered by material and shops, as to prevent any systematic attempt to regulate it, and no plan for that purpose has, as yet been arranged. Until a design for the improvement of the grounds, gateways etc. shall have been adopted, it is not practicable to estimate the ultimate expense. It is proposed therefore, to continue our operations for the present season, to finishing the footway on the outside of the wall, and progressing with regulating and planting the ground as circumstances may admit, and in the meantime, to have a plan and estimates for future consideration.\textsuperscript{106}

Because there was no plan, Congress could grant an appropriation only to finish the footway leading to the entrance of the west front.

A fire in the Library of Congress prompted Bulfinch to devise a plan for storing fuel that included a grass terrace for the base of the western front. In 1826, Bulfinch proposed four plans to Congress for fuel storage. Each plan provided a permanent location for a fire engine and “other things such as privies best kept near but not in the Capitol.”\textsuperscript{107} Three of these plans included a terrace located some distance from the west front separated from the Capitol by two courtyards. A preliminary sketch from 1826 shows two privies (each with six stalls) built in the courtyards which were created by a new west terrace. Under the terrace Bulfinch provided space for two stables with adjoining storage rooms, a guardroom and a place to park the Capitol’s fire engine.\textsuperscript{108} However, Bulfinch eventually carried out a slightly different plan that used the vaulted space beneath the terrace for the new library of Congress. (Fig. 25)
In addition to its utilitarian use, the terrace enhanced the architectural effect of the building’s west front by giving it a uniform ground line. This plan of the terrace from between 1824 and 1826 illustrates how Bulfinch conceived the terrace in relation to the slope. (See Fig. 25) The shaded areas closest to the building depict the incline of the slope. The architecturally constructed part of the terrace with three archways, which is rusticated to match the basement story of the building forms part of the upper embankment while the lower embankment is only earth. The earth embankments concealed the extra sub basement level of the four story central section, which appeared uneven situated between the three story wings. The subbasement level is visible in an illustration from 1824 that depicts a view of the west elevation from the northwest approach. (Fig. 26) From the west, this additional story gives the building an ungrounded appearance. By December 27, 1827, Bulfinch reported that the work on the grounds during the past year had been directed only to “such parts as were most essential, and which would produce a general approach towards the completion of the grounds.” A flight of steps leading to the lower terrace and two flights of steps, leading to the upper terrace… with arches for wood vaults” had been completed.¹⁰⁹

Bulfinch also reported that soil had been removed from the east part of the grounds for proper graduation to the west side to form a glacis for the terrace. Soil had also been moved to create an ascent for Pennsylvania Avenue. In addition, a cast-iron railing bordered the terrace around the building and the west grounds. The east grounds were enclosed by a wrought-iron railing similar to the fence that surrounded the entire Capitol grounds, which now comprised of twenty-two and a half acres. The
fence, begun in 1816 under Latrobe had served a more pragmatic purpose than an ornamental one. It had been necessary to prevent wandering cows, goats and hogs from destroying the grass and shrubbery.

The budget of $79,244.05 for the building season of 1827 also provided for lodges and stone piers for gates at both the east and west entrances. The lodges and piers repeated the rusticated basement and ornamentation used in Thornton’s original design. The last appropriation for the grounds under Bulfinch in 1829 included an estimates for “two lines of iron scroll railing from the western lodges to the first flight of steps” and the purchase of “one thousand trees to line both the Capitol grounds and related streets according to Bulfinch’s plan.” The railing, which ran along the central walkway in the western grounds protected the grounds from wandering livestock.

By 1828 work was completed on the terrace and well underway on the grounds. In a letter from January 14th, 1828, Bulfinch’s wife wrote to their son Greenleaf that “we went to the Capitol where we admired the high finish of the rotunda, and the western steps and circular terrace… On top is a fine walk and it is as a whole much commended by strangers.”

A foreign visitor, Frances Trollope praised the recently completed Capitol:

I am ill at describing buildings, but the beauty and majesty of the American capitol might defy an abler pen than mine to do it justice… the magnificent western façade is approached from the city by terraces and steps of bolder proportions than I ever before saw. The elegant eastern front… is on a level with a newly-planted but exceedingly handsome enclosure, which in a few
years, will offer the shade of all the most splendid trees which flourish in the Union.\textsuperscript{112}

A description of the grounds that appeared in Hill’s National Register on September 16, 1837 give a more vivid image of how the grounds appeared at this time. “The Capitol,” apparently taken from an article in the \textit{National Intelligencer}, described recent alterations to the capital’s public buildings and grounds. The entire grounds were enclosed by “a stone wall with a an iron railing and encircled by a paved walk and “macadamized” roads.”\textsuperscript{113} According to the author of the article, when the trees lining the walk reached maturity, “it will be an umbrageous walk of great beauty, the resort of thousands, and the admiration of all.” The central eastern approach was terminated by a fountain on the eastern grounds. There was also a “summer house,” located in the northwest corner of the western enclosure. The author optimistically anticipated that when “all the improvements now in progress are competed, the capitol of the union, and the public grounds adjacent to it, will present a spectacle at once grand and imposing, and every day worthy of the great nation which has provided them with such magnificent liberality.”\textsuperscript{114}

Before Congress abolished the position of Architect of Capitol, Bulfinch suggested that the public grounds “immediately adjacent should conform in some degree to the importance and high finish of the building.” As indicated in his plan, Bulfinch also proposed that the “triangular space between Pennsylvania and Maryland Avenues, and as far west as Third street at the bend of the canal, should be permanently fenced in.” He claimed that in doing so, it would secure the improvement of the grounds and allow the formation of pathways along the avenues.
He also suggested graduating the portion of Maryland avenue nearest to the Capitol and to plant the avenue with “four ranges of forest trees.” Further, Bulfinch claimed that the approaches to public buildings had not received embellishments since the Jefferson administration, when Pennsylvania Avenue was first planted and improved.

For the next fifteen years, a gardener named John Foy would maintained the grounds, though haphazardly. For the east grounds, Foy implemented a simple design with rectangular grass plots bordered by trees and flowerbeds, separated by gravel walks and encircled by a belt of close planting. However, Foy’s lack of skill was apparent when the trees he had planted grew, they dried the flowerbeds until only violets, periwinkle and weeds remained. By the 1840’s, the grounds were under the management of James Mahler, who owed his position to his friendship with President Andrew Jackson. Upon the addition of seven acres of grounds on the western slope, Maher planted the section with trees, “many of them fast growing, short-lived silver poplars and silver maples, which, after doing more or less harm to the more valuable growth, died out.”

A photograph from 1846 of the eastern elevation of the building shows that Bulfinch’s landscape scheme still persisted into the 1850’s. Trees formally delineate the western approaches as shown in Bulfinch’s landscape plan. From the photograph, it appears that trees are only used as ornamentation to line the pathways.

Throughout the 1830’s and 1840’s, little work was done to the building architecturally. Bulfinch’s departure left the Capitol under the authority of the Commissioner of Public Buildings. However, there were no significant changes to the building architecturally, and until the enlargements were begun in 1851, the building
was maintained as Bulfinch had left it. The greenery of the grounds, which were maintained by the public gardeners, only improved with age. The limited improvements to the grounds had no consequential impact on their overall effect.
Chapter 2--Politics and the Expansion of the Capitol Grounds

By 1850, the still-unfinished Capitol building had seen twelve presidents, five architects and six Commissioners of Public Buildings. Despite its convoluted and politically charged construction history, the building’s exterior appeared unified. Even the Capitol grounds were planted and considerably well maintained. However, this period of relative stability for both the nation and the Capitol site was about to end. Rising sectional and political tensions would soon threaten the future of the Union. The old Capitol as completed by Bulfinch had been designed for a smaller nation. By 1850, nearly two decades after the completion of the Capitol in 1823, it was clear that its size was no longer adequate for the growing nation. The building could no longer accommodate the increasing number of congressmen and senators from the newly admitted states. The substantial growth of the country prompted a major building campaign that would transform the Capitol into the recognizable edifice that stands today.

Political Philosophy and the Rhetoric of Internal Improvements

Like the earlier period of construction, this new phase was complicated by the government’s lack of continuity in leadership. Because the administration regularly changed, the federal government’s three branches-- the executive, legislative and the judiciary, is changing because the administration regularly changes. In the executive branch, the administrative changes every four years with the election of a new
president. Congressional elections occurred every two years for the House of Representatives, and every six years for the Senate with one third of the Senate up for election every two years. The people of each state directly elected the House of Representatives and the number of representations elected was proportional to the population of each state. Therefore, the House of Representatives was a more democratic body of government because of the frequency and nature of its elections. In contrast, the Senate was perhaps more influential, but less democratic because their terms lasted six years, and until 1913, the members were elected by their state legislatures, not the electorates of the state. The Senate also has exclusive powers such as confirming the executive appointments of certain federal positions.¹¹⁹

Despite principles of the separation of powers and system of checks and balances, the political program of the federal government largely rested upon decisions made by Congress. This is principally to ensure that decisions of national concern are truly made by a democratic government, specifically one that most directly represents its constituents. Another function of the legislative branch is actually a “legislative party function,” which is the use of legislative power to advance or defend the interest of a political party. In the ideal model of party government, political parties compete with one another for power, appealing to the electorate on the basis of principles and programs that the party pledges to translate into its public policy and course of government action. In practice, this model is rarely adhered to because of the breakdown of party divisions within Congress.¹²⁰

Because of continual changes in the administration, the interests and priorities of the government as a whole were constantly shifting. Political parties further
complicated the vacillating interests and priorities of the administrative changes. The extent of the central government’s power versus the power of the states was a pertinent issue that was at the root of division within the Democratic-Republican Party in early party politics. Founded in opposition to the elitist Federalist Party in 1792, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison formed the party on republican principles in order to protect states rights and agricultural interests of the south. The Democratic-Republican Party maintained its authority until the party divided into distinct factions with the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828. Jackson’s supporters formed the Democratic Party, which supported states rights and the agricultural interests. Under Jackson, the Democrats became the party of the common worker. The opposition became the Whig Party, which supported the power of the federal government and increasingly urban, commercial interests. Adopting a nationalistic rhetoric in order to foster a national economy, the Whigs promoted internal improvements in order to better physically and symbolically connect the country. The Whigs represented the northern elites, whose economic interests were increasingly urban and industrial. Thus, the Whigs with their northern, urban and commercial interest supported internal improvements, which favored their interests by better physically connecting the economy with railroads and canals.121

The federal government’s role in the funding and construction of internal improvements was one of the most contentious issues in antebellum politics. John Lauritz Larson defines “internal improvement” as a term first used loosely in the 1780’s to refer to the multiplicity of government programs that encouraged security, prosperity, and enlightenment among the people of the United States. The term
specifically referred to the construction of public works such as roads, canals, and railroads that improved transportation infrastructure to connect geographically isolated regions. Therefore, elites based in different geographic regions shared an economic interest in developing the internal infrastructure because it would foster trade between the previously isolated regions. According to Stephen Minicucci, many Americans shared the belief that interregional connection would unite the fragile union by fostering shared economic interests. Thus, there was a strong case for federally funded improvements as the program could serve both “local and national economic interests as well as a critical nation-building role.”

John Lauritz Larson argues that the use of federal government power for the constructive purposes of internal improvements was never proscribed by American republicanism but was a presumed legitimate authority of the federal government. One of the virtues of the republican government was its capacity to “render safe and liberal the pursuit of human improvement by representative authorities.” The Republican Party that rose to power during the Civil War readily adopted this economic and social ideology and used the notion of progress to promote the idea of a “free” society. In the case of the Capitol building and public works improvements in Washington, D.C. the Whigs and the Republican Party tended to more strongly support these projects than their Democratic opponents. This was because beautifying and modernizing the city’s public spaces and infrastructure attested to the authority and symbolic presence of the federal government. The concern for the presentation of the Capitol site and its impression on the public further reflected the increasing national self-awareness.
Increasing congressional autonomy with the introduction of Congressional committees also complicated political decisions. In 1810, the creation of permanent or “standing” committees in 1810, established fixed membership and automatic claim to all bills on a specific topic. By 1825, most work in the House of Representatives was accomplished in committees. The creation of a standing House Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds in 1837, replaced the select Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds formed in 1819. The new five-person committee was empowered to “consider all subjects relating to the public edifices and grounds within the city of Washington.” The committee reported legislation for the construction of public buildings and improvements and purchase of public property for public use. In 1871, a resolution passed which increased the membership of the committee to nine and gave it jurisdiction over “all the public buildings constructed by the United States.” In 1838, the Senate created its own Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds. This specialized committee provided both the Senate and House with further insight and recommendations for appropriations and decisions regarding the Capitol building and grounds. The members of these committees were the lead supporters of campaigns to improve the Capitol and its surrounding grounds. The persistent endorsement of an influential chairman could be instrumental in securing the support of the legislature.

The Office of the Commissioner of Public Buildings was another government agency that influenced the development of the Capitol buildings and ground. Established in 1816, it replaced the earlier offices of the Superintendent of the City of Washington (1802) and the Commissioners of the District of Columbia (1791). The
Commissioner of Public Buildings, as well as its preceding offices, was a position appointed by the President, with the approval of the Senate. It was the duty of the Commissioner of Public Buildings to appoint “the architect and all other agents engaged in the public buildings, to fix their compensation, to determine the number and description of workmen to be employed, to provide and purchase materials, to inspect plans and execution of the work, and to have general regulation and superintendence of the whole.” In 1849, the position was absorbed under the authority of the Department of the Interior. In 1867, the position was officially abolished when its duties were transferred to the Chief Engineer of the War Department.

During the 1840’s and 1850’s, congressional appropriations for the improvement of the Capitol and the grounds came at politically charged moments for the nation. Beginning in 1851, the extension of the Capitol under Millard Fillmore followed a series of events that divided the nation. In the aftermath of the Mexican War, the United States gained additional territory in the south and west, which added to the amassing sectional tensions that existed over the issue of slavery. The Compromise of 1850 temporarily diffused sectional conflict with a series of bills that restricted the expansion of slavery into the newly acquired states. However, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820, refueled the already rising sectional tensions. This decisive period in politics saw the emergence of the Republican Party, whose influence would later expedite the discussion in Congress and Senate to improve the Capitol grounds. By 1857, the Democratic Party had divided over the issue of slavery with the election of Democrat
James Buchanan. Buchanan personally opposed slavery on moral grounds, but believed that the Constitution protected it, an opinion that he publicly supported. However, this division allowed the Republican Party to gain plurality in the House and subsequently the party was able to block Buchanan’s political agenda.

With the election of the Republican President Abraham Lincoln in 1860, the Republican Party ascended to power. The Republicans held the majority in both houses, from 1861-1875, from the thirty-seventh Congress through the forty-third. This period of Republican dominance in Congress enabled the passage of legislation that supported the Republican agenda that promoted the idea of “free labor, free land and free men.” The Republican Party transformed the nation, both socially and politically with its ideologies of freedom and progress. It was during these years that Republican Senator Justin Smith Morrill, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Public Buildings, was able to secure appropriations to expand and improve the Capitol grounds. During the Civil War, and especially during the period of Reconstruction, the appearance of a powerful, unified federal government and a beautiful capital city was essential to the Republican program of internal improvements.

**Capitol Building:**

From 1828 to 1850, few changes were made to the Capitol building. Architecturally, the building was considered complete. The period saw utilitarian innovations to the building with the introduction of a hydraulics system to supply the building with fresh water in the 1830’s and the installation of gas lighting in the
During this period, Congress made few appropriations to improve the grounds because of ongoing infrastructural upgrades to the building such as the installation of water mains and gas pipes. Most appropriations were for ornamental improvements such as finishing gates and fences, installing stone flagging for the terrace and walks, and paving the terraces and approaches to the Capitol. In 1836, one exception to the series of minor improvements was the extension of the Capitol square “as far west as the first street intersecting Pennsylvania Avenue from the east.” This extended the curvilinear western boundary from the east to the west side of west First Street. (Fig. 28) Although the proposal for this extension passed in both the Senate and House with little objection, the series of proposals to further expand the grounds would transpire over the course of nearly twenty years.

For nearly a decade after Bulfinch’s departure, there were no congressional appropriations given to the improvement of the grounds. On April 6, 1838, Congress provided an appropriation of $23,127.80 completing the extension of Capitol square west and the improvement of a central footway. A decade later Congress appropriated a sum not exceeding $10,000 for the purchase and installation of lights and the laying of gas pipes on the Capitol grounds.

Robert Mills and the Competition for the Capitol Extension

After Bulfinch’s departure from office in 1828, the commissioner of public buildings hired local architects on an as-needed basis. Robert Mills, an architect from South Carolina who had studied as a draftsman for Benjamin Henry Latrobe on the Capitol, was the most frequently consulted architect. Mills had wanted to work in
Washington for many years. He pursued the position at the Capitol in 1814 and in 1826, when the building needed new architects, but did not succeed in obtaining the job. In 1830 with the aid of fellow South Carolinian Representative George McDuffie, Mills secured his first job at the Capitol, remodeling the House of Representatives to improve acoustics. Mills was also responsible for significant internal improvements to the Capitol building.

Between 1836 and 1851, Mills served as the government’s primary architect of public buildings and his work transformed the architectural landscape of the monumental core of the city. Many of Mills’ projects were significant government buildings that were located along the periphery of the undeveloped National Mall. In 1836, he designed the Washington Monument, which would not be completed until after Mills’ death in 1884. Between 1836 and 1842, Mills designed the east side and central wing of the United States Treasury building. Mills also designed the Old Patent Office Building in 1836. In 1839, Mills began the construction of the United States Post Office building. Mill’s experience working at the Capitol and constructing major government buildings in Washington, D.C, made him a viable candidate for the position to expand the Capitol building. Although the exterior of the Capitol was considered complete, the interior of the building was still unsatisfactory.

In the 1840’s, Congress commissioned a study by the Army’s Bureau of Topographical Engineers on the prospect of building an “extension” for “the better accommodation of the sittings of the House of Representatives.” Congress recognized the reality of the growing nation’s impact on the conditions inside the Capitol. Poor acoustics inside the House Chamber also played a part in Congress’s
discontent with the current conditions of the Capitol. In 1844, the House Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds concluded that the main purpose of the potential remodeling was to remedy the “defects of the sound in this Hall.” In 1845, prior to the outbreak of the Mexican War, chairman of the House Committee Public Buildings, Congressman Zadock Pratt of New York, observed that the Capitol “does not furnish the accommodation for the public business which so large an area would warrant us to expect.”

Pratt and the Committee recommended that President James Polk have plans drawn for the enlargement of the Capitol. However, more pressing events including the annexation of Texas in 1845 and the subsequent Mexican War preoccupied Congress and prevented the Committee’s resolution from passing.

Congress revived its interest in improving and enlarging the Capitol after the end of the Mexican War in 1848. While Mills became the main proponent during this time, he had proposed ideas for enlarging the building before the outbreak of the war. Mills proposed to extend the central building with a single east wing. The new wing would solve an aesthetic problem by centering the dome. However, it was apparent that there was more than one way to extend the building, for Mills would later propose an alternative method of expanding the Capitol. The question over how the Capitol would be extended would cause much debate and dissention between the House and the Senate.

At the same time that architectural ideas and plans circulated among the Capitol, Congress found its attention diverted yet again when sectional strife threatened the unity of the nation. When California applied for admission to the Union as a free state, Southerners in Congress anticipated the balance in the Senate
shifting in favor of northern opponents regarding the expansion of slavery. In an attempt to appease sectional conflict and thwart a civil war, Henry Clay proposed a series of resolutions known as the Compromise of 1850. In addition to the issue of California’s statehood, the series of bills concerned the treatment of slavery in the other territories acquired during the Mexican War, the definition of the Texas-Mexican border, the enforcement of the fugitive slave law, and the slave trade in the District of Columbia. Debate on the Compromise of 1850 lasted from January to September, taking up most of the first session of the 31st Congress.

Mills’s campaign to enlarge the Capitol provided a diversion from the serious matters at hand. Despite the uncertain future of the Capitol and unity of the nation, Mills met with both the House and Senate Committees on Public Buildings and at the request of Senate committee member Jefferson Davis, he provided new plans, sections and estimates for extending the Capitol. His new design called for a set of wings, each one hundred feet wide and two hundred feet long, which projected sixty feet from the east and west fronts of the old building, separated from it by courtyards. (Fig. 30) On September 23, 1850, Democratic Senator Jefferson Davis introduced an amendment to the Civil and Diplomatic Appropriations Bill proposing to appropriate two hundred thousand dollars for the extension of the Capitol building.

Congress did not agree to the specifics of Mill’s design. While the Senate favored the idea of extending the building with wings, the House preferred a design with only a single wing to the east front. The House Committee on Public Buildings, chaired by Richard H. Stanton of Kentucky considered a single eastern extension more economical because the east grounds provided an “ample, level and
firm site on which to build.” Building two wings would require construction on the slope of the west grounds and would encroach upon nearby streets. The Senate did not approve of Mill’s plan provided in the report of the Committee of Public Buildings, and on September 25, 1850, passed the following resolution:

Resolved, That the Committee on Public Buildings be authorized to invite plans, accompanied by estimates, for the extension of the Capitol, and to allow a premium of $500 for the plan which may be adopted by the Committees on Public Buildings (acting jointly) of the Two Houses of Congress, to be paid out of the contingent fund of the Senate.

On September 30, 1850, the National Intelligencer published an official invitation for the competition to enlarge the Capitol. The competition would provide the committees with ideas for the enlargement scheme, for they reserved the right to “form such plan by the adoption of parts of different plans submitted.” However, the President would select the architect and the design. While both the President and the House had no obligation to accept the outcome of the competition, it proceeded anyway.

A change in the presidential administration expedited the expansion project. President Zachary Taylor’s died suddenly in 1850, and was succeeded by Millard Fillmore on July 9, 1850. As a Whig, President Fillmore supported internal improvements. On December 2, 1850, Fillmore addressed Congress on their important role in executing internal improvements. He said that “if these works, of such evident importance and utility, are not accomplished by Congress, they cannot be accomplished at all.” Fillmore signed a series of bills that admitted California as
a free state, created the territories of New Mexico and Utah with slavery to be determined by popular sovereignty of the voting residents, established the west boundary of Texas, outlawed the slave trade in Washington D.C and enacted a fugitive slave law. Shortly after signing the remainder of Clay’s compromise, Fillmore approved of the Civil and Diplomatic Appropriation Bill for 1851 that included an appropriation of one hundred thousand dollars for the extension of the Capitol. Historian of the Capitol, William C. Allen noted that Fillmore’s acknowledgment of the necessity of enlargement and his appropriation served as a concrete expression of faith in the future of the Union and the Capitol building.\textsuperscript{143}

It is not surprising that Millard Fillmore of New York, a Whig, would support the project of expanding the Capitol. The Whig Party, formed in opposition to the Democratic Party under Andrew Jackson, had a primarily nationalistic agenda. They promoted the power of the federal government, commercial interests and internal improvements. However, by Fillmore’s administration, the issue of slavery had divided the Whigs and in 1854, the northern Whigs would merge to form the Republican Party. During his administration, the Whigs were in the minority in both the House and the Senate.

At least thirteen architects submitted plans to the competition including Charles B. Cluskey of Washington, Charles F. Anderson and Cyrus W. Warner of New York, and Frank W. Vodges of St. Louis. Most had local reputations, but only Mills of Washington and Thomas Ustick Walter of Philadelphia had worked on national commissions.\textsuperscript{144} After both committees on Public buildings examined the various submissions, it became clear that there would be no agreement on how the
building should be enlarged. The House still preferred additional wings while the Senate remained resolute on an expansion by a single eastward expansion. The Senate committee divided the $500 premium among the four architects with the most promising plans and instructed Mills to produce a composite of the best features of the winning designs. While the Senate committee took a public position on the issue of the Capitol extension, the House committee did not by failing to issue a report because its members were not unanimous on the subject. However, Chairman of the House committee Richard Stanton reported to the *National Intelligencer* that their main objection to building wings was because of the cost of enlarging the grounds and altering the terraces on the west side of the building. Because neither congressional committee on Public buildings agreed with the manner in which the building should be extended, the President was left to make the final decision.

Competitors gathered in Washington for the second session of the 31st Congress, which ran from December 2, 1850 to March 3, 1851. The President received letters of recommendation for the architects from politicians and other influential people. After hearing rumors that Fillmore would select only an architect who was a Whig, New Yorker Anderson wrote directly to the President asserting his belief that the appointed architect “should strain every nerve to keeping power the party of the individual whose means they obtain such extensive and honorable employment.” The architect who had strongest ties to the Whig party was Thomas U. Walter. After returning to Washington with a new plan that comprised of detached wings with connecting corridors and chambers, Walter met with the Fillmore and his advisors on June 4th, 1851 to explain the features of his design. On
June 9th, another meeting took place and the following afternoon Walter received the appointment. Unlike the architects before him who reported to the Commissioner of Public Buildings, Walter was to report to the Secretary of the Interior, Alexander H.H Stuart. Historian of the Capitol William C. Allen noted that most people agreed that President Fillmore had made a politically motivated decision when he hired Walter. In the spirit of compromise, he had chosen the architect favored by the House of Representatives to enlarge the Capitol in the manner favored by the Senate.148

Walter and the Capitol Extension

Before working on the Capitol extension, Walter worked as the architect for Girard College in Philadelphia. In 1832 at only twenty-eight, Walter won the architectural competition for its design. While architect, he would meet Congressman Joseph R. Chandler of Philadelphia who also served as a member of the board of trustees for the Girard college project. William C. Allen points out that this association along with Walter’s visits with politicians in Washington was instrumental in his ultimately receiving the commission. Walter’s documented account of his meetings “illustrate what was necessary to compete for an important federal commission.” Records of Walter’s travels show that he was in Washington meeting with Senator Hunter, chairman of the Committee on Public Buildings, as well as his long term friend, Congressman Joseph R. Chandler. On October 17, 1850, Walter made a second trip to Washington to study the current conditions of the Capitol Building. Walter made a third trip on November 22, 1850 where he met with Robert, the Senate sergeant-at-arms, who introduced him to President Fillmore.
Walter would make at least ten visits to Washington, where he continued to foster relationships with Congressmen such as Richard Stanton and Jefferson Davis and President Fillmore.\(^\text{149}\)

In order to accommodate the new and larger chambers for the House and Senate, Walter devised a plan that unified the additional wings and the original building. Walter’s final plan for the extension of the Capitol provided for wings to be attached directly to the north and south ends of the old building. (Fig. 31) The wings were advanced eastward to avoid the west terraces. Walter struggled with the devising a way to connect the wings without covering the side windows and doors of the old building. After no one had been able to come up with an appropriate scheme, Secretary of State Daniel Webster suggested building the extensions a short distance from the Capitol and connecting them by narrow corridors so that light and air coming into the building would not be disturbed.\(^\text{150}\) This drawing by Walter from 1851 illustrates how he envisioned the east elevation and courtyard. (Fig. 32)

The Politics of the Grounds

In 1846, the eastern grounds of the Capitol were rather barren, with trees used as ornamental delineators of pathways. (See Fig. 29) A lithograph from 1839 that depicts the same view as the photograph from 1846 shows the trees as less mature in their growth. (Fig. 33) The lithograph, which shows people walking in the paths of the eastern courtyard, also presents trees closest to the building that do not exist in the later photograph. While it is unlikely that they were planted in that course of time, it is apparent that the image shows an idealized vision of the eastern grounds. In a
lithograph from 1850 of the east side of the building, the angle has obscured the trees but shows a view of the eastern courtyard. (Fig. 34) It also gives an idea of the density of the trees on the western grounds behind the building. The trees, which appear dense and forest-like encircle the base of the building. Formal, linear pathways that form perpendicular angles accentuate the formal fences that surround the building. The grounds immediately surrounding the building are completely absent of trees, but rather are open, formally delineated lawns.

Written descriptions of the grounds from this time provide another view of the public space. In an 1847 article from the *Alexandria Gazette*, the author alludes a sense of disorder as the scene was a mixture of “the sober minded and discreet” and also the “boisterous lads, romping misses and noisy children.” In a report from the Commissioner of Public Buildings in 1848 published in the *Daily Globe*, the author states that the grounds are “in very good order, with the exception of the irregular and unsightly paths, which inconsiderate persons have made by walking upon the sward instead of keeping on the pavement.” The Commissioner attributes this conduct due to the fact that there is “no law to punish such evident impropriety” and therefore it is “in vain to appeal to good sense and taste when neither is respected.

With plans for the extension of the Capitol building underway, it became clear that the surrounding grounds also would have to be enlarged. The existing boundaries of the grounds extended from First Street west to First Street east to A Street north and A Street south. Because the additional wings would come within feet of A Street north and south, in March 1852, the Senate directed its Committee on Public buildings:
To inquire how far, and in what direction, the grounds around the Capitol will have to be extended in conformity with the plan of the extension of the building that has begun: how much private property would be included in such extension of the grounds; and what amount of money would probably be required to purchase said private property, and make necessary improvements of the grounds in consequence of the extension.\textsuperscript{152}

After two years had passed, and no progress had been made to improve the grounds, a new Commissioner of Public Buildings, Benjamin B. French, called attention to Congress’ ongoing neglect of the Capitol grounds. French noted that both he and his predecessor, William Easby, estimated fifteen thousand dollars was needed for removing “fences, grading streets, &c., preparatory to the extension of the Capitol square” and stated that “I conceive it my duty again to call the attention of Congress to this important subject” because the exterior of the additional wings were scheduled for completion by the following winter.\textsuperscript{153} To accommodate the extensions, French suggested that the circular roads on the north and south of the Capitol be extended so as to connect at New Jersey Avenue south, and at Delaware avenue north, with B streets north and south. French’s proposal did not require the purchase of private property, as the government already owned the public avenues within the proposed boundaries. (Fig. 35) Under French’s proposal, the grounds would increase in width and assume the shape of a “T,” expanding from thirty-one acres to forty-one acres. The boundaries and corners of French’s plan are all curvilinear and responded to the existing curvilinear western boundary that had been established by L’Enfant.
Before serving as Commissioner of Public Buildings, Benjamin B. French of New Hampshire began his career in Washington as an inveterate federal office holder, advancing from assistant clerk to clerk of the House of Representatives. In 1853, an old friend a fellow New Hampshire Democrat, Franklin Pierce, rewarded French for his support in the presidential election of 1852 by appointing him Commissioner of Public Buildings. However, in 1855, Pierce was informed of French’s fleeting association with the Know-Nothing party, and forced French’s resignation. French’s interest in the party was the result of his dissatisfaction with the Democratic Party and his increasing doubts about slavery. By the 1860’s, French had completed his political transformation and firmly associated himself with the Republican Party.

By February of 1855, Congress came to the consensus that extension of the Capitol necessitated the enlargement of the grounds north and south of the building. The two new wings, which came within feet of the existing borders of A street north and A street south, were expected to be completed by the next session of Congress. The Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds passed the bill appropriating fifteen hundred dollars to begin clearing the grounds in preparation to the extension of the grounds according to French’s plan. The bill was not intended for the immediate implementation of French’s plan, but for the “removal of fences, grading streets… and to make preparations necessary for the extension” of the building. In an effort to facilitate discussion regarding the specifics of a plan for the enlargement of the grounds, Congressman Edwin M. Stanton of Kentucky questioned the Chairman of the Committee on Public buildings whether French’s plan would conflict with
original plan in connection with the extension of the building. He noted that the terraces would have to be altered, and “a great deal of work done, besides removing fences and rubbish,” a cost which would exceed fifteen thousand dollars. Stanton insisted that Congress should decide between the plans immediately if they did conflict. However, decisions regarding the plan for enlarging the grounds were held off as the appropriation only covered the cost of preparatory work to clear the grounds.

In October 1855, the new Commissioner of Public buildings, John Blake, urged Congress to appropriate more money and adopt an official plan for the extension of the grounds. He explained that the fifteen thousand dollars had been used to fill and grade the grounds north of the building, but the amount was insufficient for completing the necessary work on the south grounds. He attributed this to the fact that “the appropriation… was not based on any specific estimate, but was designed to accomplish as much work as possible, without any special designation of the extent.” He proposed an additional $66,000 to complete the unfinished portion of the south grounds. He justified that the increased amount was due to the topography of the south grounds. The south grounds covered a greater surface area and required more filling because of the greater depth in the elevation. Blake reiterated what French had already advised when he suggested that “it would be advisable to adopt a plan as soon as possible, and proceed to carry it out without delay, so that when the Capitol is completed the grounds may be in a condition corresponding with the extent and magnificence of the building.” Blake reported that without a plan, it would be
impossible to predict the extent and cost of future improvements. Further, determining an estimate of the final cost would be inconceivable without a plan.\textsuperscript{155}

By 1856, members of both houses shared their support for enlarging the Capitol grounds. Senator Albert Brown of Mississippi submitted a resolution instructing the Commissioner of Public Buildings to inquire into the cost of purchasing privately owned lots as far west as Third street so as to expand the Capitol grounds. In response to Blake’s report, Brown, on behalf of the Senate, instructed the Commissioner of Public buildings to inquire and report to both houses at what price the lots belonging to private individuals within the following boundaries:

Commencing at the north gate of the Capitol and following Delaware avenue to its intersection with B street north; along B street to Third west; along Third street to its intersection with B street south; along said street to New Jersey avenue; and along said avenue to the south gate of the Capitol.\textsuperscript{156}

In addition to ascertaining the price requested by the proprietors, Blake was instructed to determine what the property is worth “according to the value affixed to real estate in the city.”\textsuperscript{157}

Two weeks later, Congressman Alfred Greenwood offered another resolution that instructed the Committee on Public Buildings to “inquire into the expediency of purchasing square No. 575, and part of square No. 576”. These two squares were located directly west of the existing western boundary at First Street. Square No. 575 was located north of Pennsylvania Avenue west, bound by First Street to the west and B street to the north. Square No. 576 mirrored square No. 575, but was located south of Maryland avenue South, bound by First street on the west an B street on the south.
The addition of these two squares would extend the grounds further to the west, and secure an easier transition from the west end of the Mall to the Capitol grounds. (Fig. 36)

The period of debate within Congress and the Senate over the expansions of the grounds, lasting from the early 1850’s until the early 1870’s, marked a significant period in the history of the country. During the antebellum period, with the election of Democrat Franklin Pierce in 1853, the 32nd through 34th Congress was dominated by the Democratic Party with a Democratic majority in the House and Senate. However, the period also saw the reconfiguration of the existing political party system. In 1854, Pierce repealed the Missouri Compromise with the Kansas-Nebraska act, which created the territories of Kansas and Nebraska and allowed settlers to determine through popular sovereignty whether to allow slavery in the territories. This caused a split in the Democratic Party as the anti-slavery Democrats merged with the former Whig Party to form the Republican Party.

In the post-war period, the Republican Party functioned as the dominating force in Congress. The Republican Party remained in control, holding a majority in Congress from the election of Lincoln in 1860 until factions divided the party in the 1870’s. It was the Republican ideology that promoted internal improvements as fundamental to the program of national reconstruction that drove/informed their campaign to improve the Capitol grounds. Just as the establishment of railroads and canals would physically connect the country and promote the Republican’s northern, commercial interests, the completion and beautification of the national Capitol would symbolically communicate the power and unity of the federal government.
Throughout the course of the debate, it is evident that regional origins of individual members of Congress informed the divisions among the House and Senate over the improvement of the grounds. Although the majority of the Senate consistently supported the improvement of the grounds throughout the debate, in the years leading up to the Civil War, members of the Senate had different opinions as to the extent to which the grounds should be enlarged and improved. Because the majority of the Senate were Democrats in the antebellum period, it was regional origins that divided the Senate over improvements to the grounds. Between 1854 and 1860, the Democratic Senators from the North East most heavily favored the enlargement of the Capitol grounds. Senators such as James Bayard of Delaware, Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, and William P. Fessenden of Maine all spoke at length in favor of appropriations to improve the grounds. Their arguments emphasized the importance of providing the Capitol building with a suitable setting to beautify the Capitol in order to enhance its presentation. The Senators in opposition tended to be from Southern and Western states, such as Senator Samuel Houston of Texas, Thomas Jefferson Husk of Texas and Robert Hunter of Virginia.

Although inquiries into extending the grounds had been ongoing since 1852, an official bill proposing to extend the grounds did not appear until 1857. Senator James Bayard Jr., chairman of the Senate Committee on Public Buildings proposed the most detailed expropriation plan that composed the bill to extend the grounds according to the boundaries agreed upon by both Committees on Public Buildings. He insisted that “it is absolutely necessary that it (the bill) should be passed at this session” and that it is unlikely that the bill would give rise to a debate. However, the
Senate disagreed with Mr. Bayard’s notion that the bill would not give rise to discussion and it was agreed that a “bill of this importance ought to be printed.” This was reaffirmed by Mr. Bayard’s estimate of an expenditure of three hundred thousand dollars in which his fellow senators felt that it would be impossible to “entertain the idea of passing a bill of that kind without the examination of anybody.” Senator Bayard came from a family of Senators from Delaware. His father, brother, and grandfather had all served as Senators from Delaware. Bayard was a conservative Democrat who opposed the Civil War,

The Senate postponed the bill to be discussed again two days later when again, Senator Bayard stressed the necessity of passing the bill in order to begin improvements on the grounds. He emphasized the importance of accomplishing the first step in defining the boundaries of the grounds because without determined limits, it is impossible to continue with the necessary improvements. He explained that if the bill isn’t passed, the grounds cannot “be completed until the lines are defined; and the heaviness of the embankment of the southern side will require an interval of two years before a railing can be placed there or the street paved.” Unlike the Senators who felt that there was no necessity for the bill because the “public buildings have not yet been finished,” Senator Bayard recognized the need for expediency because of the nature of the project. He explained that an engineer who had surveyed the grounds determined that it would take the south grounds, with its large embankment, between one and two years to settle before any further improvements can be made. Delaying the process of determining the boundaries would further delay the necessary processes that were required to physically improve the grounds. In an effort to pass
the bill as soon as possible, Senator Bayard amended his bill to provide details of the boundaries. In one of the sections of the amendment, he proposed that the grounds be extended according to a plan, approved by the Committees on Public Buildings of the Senate and House of Representatives in 1857. The “Plat Made for the Purchase of Additional Grounds”, dated 1857 depicts the area in question with the certificate of Randolph Coyle, surveyor and both chairmen of the House and Senate Committees on Public Buildings and Grounds, Edward Ball and James Bayard. (Fig. 38) In the amendment, Bayard specified the boundaries and conditions of the enlargement:

Between First street east and First street west, in the following manner:

Northwardly to the south side of B street, and southwardly to the north side of south B street, including, in addition to so much of the reservations, avenues and streets as are necessary for such extension, the two squares designated on the plan of Washington as no. 687 and 688.

Bayard’s bill proposed boundaries similar to those originally proposed by French. However, Bayard’s boundaries included additional privately owned land east of the north and south gates of the Capitol at the intersection of New Jersey Avenue and A Streets. These two additional squares, numbers 687 and 688 would widen the eastern boundaries on the ground from the north and south. Unlike French’s plan, the grounds would not form a “T” shape, but would assume a more regular shape as it assumed the entire length of B Street compared to only the portion west as indicated in French’s plan. His proposal also called for the provision of “more safe and convenient approaches from Pennsylvania Avenue into First Street west and north B Street, and from Maryland Avenue into First Street west and south B Street.” He further
explained that a portion of ground, an arc of a circle of two hundred and thirty feet radius, will be cut from the southeast corner of square number 575, which will “touch Pennsylvania Avenue at a point in the front of said square 177 feet and 6 inches westward from the southeast angle thereof.” A similar portion of ground, an arc of a circle of two hundred and thirty feet radius, would be taken from the northeast corner of square number 576, which will “touch Maryland Avenue at a point in the front of said square 177 feet and 6 inches westward from the northeast angle thereof.” In addition to specifications of the extension plan, Bayard explained that in order to put said plan into effect, it is imperative to obtain the necessary private property. In his amendment, he instructed the Secretary of the Interior to make an application to the circuit court for the District of Columbia, which would appoint five “disinterested and impartial commissioners, freeholders, and residents” to conduct a “just and equitable appraisement” of the cash value of the real estate in question.\(^\text{161}\)

Although both the Committees on Public Buildings of the House and the Senate approved of Bayard’s plan, there were varying opinions as to the extension of the grounds in a westerly direction. Likely advised by Walter, and with support from the House Committee on Public buildings, Bayard opposed the more extensive western boundaries advocated by some of his fellow senators.\(^\text{162}\) Senator Bayard explained in his proposal that because there is no projection of the building in a westerly direction, thus there was no reason to enlarge the grounds in that direction. The topography of the western grounds with its steep incline would be difficult to grade and would delay the completion of the grounds, leaving them in their “present
confused, disorganized state for years after the new Capitol will have been
occupied.”163

Other senators favored a more extensive expansion of the grounds. Senator
Stephen Douglas of Illinois criticized Senator Bayard’s plan because it “failed to
secure for the public grounds that breadth on the lower side of the slope, the western
slope facing the city, that we ought to have.” Douglas preferred a more ambitious
plan that called for the “largest amount of ground for the park surrounding the public
buildings” that extended to C street north and south and as far west as Second or
Third Street west. He explained that if a curtailment must be made, it should be on the
east side of the grounds where the Committee of Public buildings had proposed the
inclusion of squares six hundred and eight seven and six hundred and eighty eight.164

Senator Henry Wilson from Massachusetts agreed with Senator Douglas’
recommendations, pointing to the “great fault in Washington, and all American
cities” that “we have neglected to provide public grounds large enough.” Wilson
speculated that if the grounds surrounding public buildings such as the Treasury
Building, Patent Office or the Post Office Department had been better preserved, they
might have been “ornaments to the city of Washington.” For the amount of money
spent on building the Capitol, he believed that the grounds should be large enough
and “ornamented and beautified, so that all who visit the Capitol will see in these
public grounds something to attract their admiration.”165 Further he claimed that no
amount of money is of consequence to the country compared to the importance of
having grounds that are large enough and beautifully adorned.
Senator William B. Fessenden also supported the more extensive scheme, envisioning that the grounds would eventually extend to C streets north and south. Fessenden argued that it would be more economical to purchase the necessary privately owned land immediately rather than wait until rising land values prevented such acquisitions. In the address to the Senate, he commented on the poor visual impression of the building:

Now, sir, that we shall be obliged to go to a larger extent on each side of the Capitol, and take in some portion of those grounds, is very manifest. In the first place, to a person walking up in this direction, when he arrives at the bottom of the grounds the Capitol cannot be seen. It makes no show, or only a small portion of it does. It does not present the appearance that a building that has cost so much ought to do. Considering for one single moment what the feeling of this country is—that if we are not we are to be the greatest nation on the face of the earth, it would seem very singular to allow the building up of this city to go on, and be contracted in the grounds as we are at present, or must be if what the committee propose be adopted, and leave it to the future to clear the buildings surrounding the Capitol at a very much greater cost than would be necessary at the present time.

Despite several Senator’s requests to postpone the bill, the Senate voted to amend Bayard’s bill to the extensive boundaries advocated by Douglas, Wilson and Fessenden, although members of the Committee on Public buildings were opposed. Bayard expressed apprehension at the cost of the extension, estimating that it would cost between $1,500,000 and $2,000,000 to purchase the additional land and
demolish the existing buildings.\textsuperscript{166} When these large sums were presented to the House, the proposal was defeated.

In the following months, both the Commissioner of Public Buildings, John Blake and the Secretary of the Interior, J. Thompson pleaded with Congress to adopt a plan so that an appropriation could be made and improvements to the grounds could commence. Neither Blake nor Thompson gave a preference on the extent to which the grounds should be extended for the matter is a “question to be determined by congressional action.”\textsuperscript{167} In his annual report from November 6, 1858, Blake noted that the last appropriation given by Congress had been two years ago for $fifteen thousand, which had been used to fill the north and south grounds. The consequence of the lack of appropriations and plan would be a delay in the preparation for the roadway approaches on the north and south side of the building as the Capitol extension neared completion.

**Additional Lots/Eminent Domain**

One major point of dissention within Congress regarding Senator Bayard’s bill was the method of acquiring the privately owned land that was deemed necessary for the enlargement of the grounds. It had been since 1856 that the Committee on Public buildings first inquired the purchase of lots belonging to private individuals. Senator Bayard’s bill from 1857 called for the circuit court for the District of Columbia to appoint five “disinterested and impartial commissioners, freeholders and residents in the said district” to make a just and equitable appraisement of the cash value of the property. Once the land is appropriated for public use and is property of
the United States, the Commissioner of Public buildings was authorized to “enter and take possession of the property so appropriated without suit or process.”¹⁶⁸

The question of eminent domain, or the federal government’s authority to appropriate privately owned land for public use is affirmed by the Fifth Amendment. The legislature is given the power to authorize this act, however the takings clause in the Fifth Amendment limits the power of eminent domain by requiring the government to provide “just compensation” for the appropriated property. In addition, the takings clause ensured the individuals due process, under which the government must respect the natural rights of its citizens, and provide them with fair hearing and just compensation. However, until the ratification of the fourteenth amendment in 1868, the limitations of eminent domain restricted its power only to the federal government and not state legislatures.¹⁶⁹

To many members of Congress, the method of acquiring the private lots in question was undemocratic in its procedure and constituted as abuse of the federal government’s power of condemnation. The acquisition of the private lots was essential to the expansion of the grounds, and would continue to cause dissention throughout the course of the congressional debate. In the conflict between the interests of the federal government versus those of individual citizens, members of the House would naturally support the interests of the people. However, the political party and regional interests of individual congressmen also influenced their support. This is most evident in regard to the support and opposition of individual members of the Senate.
Democratic Senator Samuel Houston of Texas stated that while he did not care how magnificent or extensive the grounds should be, he did oppose to the principle of the government’s method of obtainment of the additional lots. He claimed that by it, the “government assumes the whole power and privilege of determining what the rights of the citizens are” for they have “no option, no election in the matter.” Houston argued that it was undemocratic of the government to confiscate private property without their consent or involvement. The judge could appoint five commissioners from any parts of the District of Columbia, both “persons acquainted and unacquainted with the value of the property.” He claimed that it was only fair for the citizens to have a voice in the selection of the arbitrators so that they would be self-represented. He asserted that he had not witnessed on any occasion in the Senate a more “direct attack on the rights and liberties of citizens than is contained in this proposition.” He suggested postponing the measure for a year in order to give the committee the opportunity to revise their actions.170

While Congress debated over the extent to which the grounds should be enlarged, landowners were reluctant to make improvements while others were busy making improvements that would increase the eventual acquisition cost to the government. Commissioner of Public Buildings John Blake noted in his 1858 annual report that “great public and private injury is resulting from the delay in deciding upon a plan for the extension of the Capitol grounds.”171 The people owning property within the limits of the plan for the expansion were hesitant to make improvements because of their uncertainty of the future of their property. He also points out that
others, have begun improvements that will increase the value of their property, which would consequently increase the cost to the Government.

In 1860, Congress amended the conditions and boundaries considered for the acquisition of additional land for the grounds. In an amendment to the act making appropriations for sundry civil expenses of the government for the year ending June 13, 1861, Congress instructed the district attorney of the United States for the District of Columbia, under the direction of the President to ascertain the fair cash value of the real estate within the following limits:

So much of square 575 as is included in the following described lines:

beginning on the west side of First street west, at a point 67 feet north of the southeast corner of said square; and running thence south with the line of First street west to the southeast corner of said square; thence with the line of Pennsylvania Avenue along the boundary of said square in said avenue 180 feet; thence in a straight line to the point of beginning; also so much of square 576 as is included within the following described lines: beginning on the west side of first street west, at a point 67 feet south of square of the northeast corner of said square … and also the whole of squares 687 and 688.\(^{172}\)

In his report from February 13, 1861, district attorney Robert Ould reported that the cost to purchase the aforesaid property would not exceed $500,000. He explained that while there had been “no special mode pointed out by which the fair cash value of said real estate should be ascertained,” he had selected nine citizens of the city of Washington, “selected from various localities” were requested to ascertain “by personal inspection and mutual consultation” the cash value of the said premises.
This committee of nine individuals consisted of Walter S. Cox, Walter Lenox, Thomas. J Fisher, George W. Riggs, Samuel Bacon, Richard Wallach, John Van Riswick, J.M Brodhead and John D. Brandt. The results of their examination determined that the aggregate amount of the total value was $417,574.90. He also reported that letters had been sent to the private owners regarding their own perceived values of their property, to which many answered. However, he noted that although it is “not within the province of this report to express an opinion on the merits of these propositions,” he reported that the values named by the owners exceeded those fixed by the nine commissioners.173

Civil War

Once again, efforts to improve the grounds were thwarted by shifting interests and priorities. The outbreak of the Civil War in April 1861 prevented Congress from making the appropriations necessary to purchase the targeted proprietors. Secretary of the Interior Caleb B. Smith asserted that the “propriety of making a purchase involving so large an expenditure, at a time when the demands upon the Treasury for the support of the war have rendered a resort to direct taxation necessary, must be determined by Congress.”174 Although no appropriations to improve the grounds were made during the Civil War, construction on the building continued.

The change in the presidential administration also helped the effort to improve the Capitol grounds. The election of Republican President Abraham Lincoln in 1861 secured the prominence and authority of the Republican Party in the legislature. Both the Senate and the House of Representatives had a Republican majority. The
Republicans had formed in opposition to the prospect of the expansion of slavery into the western states. The Republican Party was composed of former moderate and conservative Whigs, former northern Democrats who opposed slavery, and radicals. The party represented Northern, urban and commercial interests, and thus supported the power of the federal government in order to promote these interests.

The Civil War brought significant changes to Congress that also benefited the campaign to improve the Capitol grounds. The southern states’ secession from the union left the House and the Senate with fewer members and a large Republican majority. When the 37th Congress met on July 4, 1861, the Republicans had a 106-42 majority in the House with 28 third-party members, and a 31-11 majority in the Senate. The Republicans continued to dominate the majority until 1875, when dividing factions threatened the unity of the party. During this period of Republican autonomy, the party was able to make progress on a Republican agenda that had previously been prevented by the power of the Southern Democrats.

While no bills to improve the grounds were passed during the war, the architect, the Commissioner of Public Buildings and the Secretary of the Interior, continued to advocate for an appropriation to improve the grounds. Recently reappointed Commissioner of Public Buildings, Benjamin B. French, took advantage of wartime needs, recommending that Congress purchase the aforementioned land for it had “quite a large number of substantial brick buildings that would make excellent hospitals or quarters for troops.” If they were to take possession of the land immediately, the government would save “the enormous rent now paid” by the use of the buildings.
By the 1860’s, French had become deeply invested in the effort to improve the grounds. Nearly ten years earlier while serving his first appointment as Commissioner of Public buildings and grounds, French initiated the improvement of the grounds with his recommendation for extending its boundaries. Once a Whig, French had undergone a political transformation and now aligned himself with the Republican Party. Upon his return, his pleas to Congress expressed his concern for the impression of the poor appearance of the building. He wrote, “to the eye of one having any appreciation of the beautiful in architecture or the fitness of things, it is certainly anything but pleasant to see the beautiful north and south facades perched up on unseemly banks of rough earth, and approached by an unseemly fight of wooden steps that would be pronounced inappropriate to the most humble dwelling!”

French would continue to play an influential role in his persistent recommendations to the Senate and Congress for the improvement of the grounds until 1867, when his position was abolished and his duties transferred to the Chief Engineer of the War Department.

The approaching completion of the Capitol building’s extensions and dome in 1867 provided an incentive to begin work on the grounds. By 1864, architect of the Capitol, Thomas U. Walter had turned his attention from the building to the grounds. He wrote:

The time has arrived when it becomes necessary to make some arrangement for completing the grounds around the Capitol. The new wings approach within seventeen feet of the line of A Street, north and south, and the
embankments already reach beyond the middle of these streets; it is necessary that they be vacated, and the grounds enlarged north and south.

Walter believed that no additional property was needed because the grounds already owned by the government, which extended to “B Street north and south, from west First Street to Delaware avenue on one side, and New Jersey avenue on the other;” were “quite sufficient to give a proper effect to its architecture.” Walter recommended forcing the Washington and Georgetown Railroad Company to remove track from First Street in the north west direction for one block, then east on B Street in the north west/north east direction for two blocks, then south across the Capitol grounds on the east side of the building. He recommended that they replace the track along A Street north to east First Street. He also advised that “the authority be obtained from Congress” for grading the streets on the north and south, and for vacating A street on either side” and that measures be taken to begin filling the area north and south, from the Capitol to B street. Walter estimated that in order to commence and continue the improvements at hand, it would require an appropriation of 1 $50,000. 179

In a plan that accompanied this report, Walter delineated his own recommendations for the boundaries and the new route for the railroad, which would run around across the west First Street and north along B Street south. (Fig. 38) In his scheme, he provided his own ideas that differed from the plans that had been discussed in Congress. He suggested that the corners of Capitol square “be rounded, so as to admit of a graceful and easy curve” so that the site of the Capitol building is no longer rectilinear. The curve of the boundaries of the ground is repeated in his
extension of the system of terraces that architect Charles Bulfinch had completed in 1826. In his plan, Walter expanded the system of alternating bands of terrace, walkways and the natural slope of the ground to extend north and south of the present boundaries at A street north and south. He proposed to continue the terrace by curving it around the corners of the new additional north and south wings to extend and connect to the east entrances.

However, in an unexpected turn of events, Walter resigned from his position as architect of the Capitol on June 1, 1865. Neither the dome nor the extension of the Capitol had been completed. Walter’s successor, architect Edward Clark recommended adopting the plan that Benjamin French had proposed years earlier so that the terracing of the west grounds could begin.

Reconstruction

In the period following the Civil War, the discussion of improving the Capitol grounds was largely complicated by the politics of Reconstruction. During this time, the Republican Party had risen to power and controlled Congress, yet the task of reconstructing the nation would eventually lead to the factional demise of the party. Following the Civil war, Congress had emerged as the most powerful branch of government. Contention between Congress and President Andrew Johnson over the requirements for seceded states readmission delayed the process of reconstructing Congress for nearly three years after the surrender at Appomattox in 1865. It was not until June, 1868 that the six southern states were readmitted, but the process of restoring the four remaining states to the Union spanned another two years.¹⁸⁰
President Johnson campaigned for a conciliatory form of political reconstruction that advanced southern interests and countered those of the Republicans who had formed its own method of reconstruction.

Political parties and sectionalism complicated the process of political reconstruction. Following the Civil War, the hostile division between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party along sectional lines, which influenced their programs for reconstruction based on their economic, political and social interests. The Republican Party had always supported Northern interests, and the Civil War reaffirmed the political ascendancy of the party. The tactics of the party had always been to appeal on strictly sectional lines to the numerically stronger portion of the Union. The Republican view that there were enough electoral and congressional votes in the united north to control the national government became evident in their resistance to the readmission of southern Congressmen, which would challenge their control of power. In contrast, the Democratic Party constituted a more national representation. Sectional division in the Democratic Party had existed since 1860, and with the outcome of the Civil War, the southern vote became a prime consideration for the party. Therefore, the Democratic Party sought to appease the South just as much as the policy of the Republican Party was to advance the interests of the North.\textsuperscript{181}

In their current state, the grounds that were enclosed covered twenty-six acres. The embankments from the additional wings reached over into A Street on both the north and south boundaries of the Capitol. (See Fig. 37) Because the government owned the land west of the Capitol building between A and B Streets, no purchase of
private property were necessary to expand the grounds north and south to B Street.
The considerable expenditure that stalled the House of Representatives to approve of
the appropriation bills involved the private property located east and west of the
current boundaries. These lots, numbered 575 and 576 on the west side of west First
Street and lots 687 and 688 located to the north and south of A Street north and A
Street south.

In 1866, Senator Trumbull reintroduced Senator Bayard’s bill to enlarge the
grounds surrounding the Capitol according to the boundaries stated in the bill. The
Senator from Illinois also resurrected district attorney Robert Ould’s estimate for
enlarging the grounds to fifty-eight acres and suggested that the government purchase
the additional land using the appraised values from 1861. In the case that the
Secretary of the Interior is unable to agree with the owners as to the price, the bill
contains a provision for the condemnation of the property under the direction of the
Supreme Court of the District of Columbia. Senator Trumbull also recommended
improvements to the landscape by grading the east grounds to lie evenly with the west
grounds. He noted that the elevation of the ground at First Street east was eight feet
higher than the base of the Capitol’s center steps, giving the building a “very low
appearance.”

Because Robert Ould’s estimate was already five years old, opposition to the
bill was based on the fact that the value of the property had increased since the war.
Again, those who supported the interests and civil liberties of the property owners
were those whose own ideologies opposed the undemocratic nature of the acquisition
for the sake of the government. Democratic Senator Reverdy Johnson of Maryland
was one of the principal opponents to the conditions of Senator Trumbull’s bill. Senator Johnson believed that Congress “must give the owners of property taken for public use what the worth of the property is at the time of the taking.” If the landowners are not willing to sell and the current value is more than the $360,000 dollars that Robert Ould had estimated, then “we cannot get it from them without paying them what it is found to be actually worth.”

While the House and Senate Committees on Public Buildings had unanimously agreed to the boundaries of the plan first proposed by Senator Bayard the issue concerning the cost and method of acquisition of the additional privately owned lots continued to thwart the passage of the bill. Although there were dissentions to the amendment of the bill regarding the purchase of these lots in the Senate, it was the House that continually blocked the passage of the bill. In response to the bill introduced by Senator Trumbull in 1866, the House moved to “suspend the rules,” which required the agreement of two thirds of the majority of the House.

Despite the contention in Congress over the project to expand the grounds, the grounds still required maintenance. On March 30, 1867, Congress appropriated $20,000 to grade, fill and improve the Capitol grounds. However, the House displayed its typical reaction to such an appropriation and delayed the bill from passing by referring it to other committees, such as the Committee on Appropriations.

The bill to expand the grounds was proposed again in 1868, 1870, and again in 1872 when the bill finally passed both the Senate and the House. Although the bill had passed unanimously in the Senate as early as 1866, the House had argued to wait
until the completion of the building before taking action on the extension of the grounds.\textsuperscript{186} For the next six years, a range of divisions within Congress would influence the debate over the improvement of the grounds. Conflicting interests between the Senate and the House, the Republicans and the Democrats, and the Northerners and Southerners would be addressed in the course of the series of contentious discussions.

During this period, Republican Senator Justin Smith Morrill became the leading advocate for the improvement of the Capitol grounds. Senator Morrill’s involvement and persistence would eventually convince both houses. Morrill would lead the cause during the most contentious period in the debate over the Capitol grounds. In 1870, as the new chairman of the Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds, replacing Senator William P. Fessenden, Morrill proposed an amended version of the Senator Trumbull’s bill from 1866. While the boundaries remained the same, Morrill’s amendments concerned the conditions of acquiring the additional lots, numbers 575, 576 to the east, and 687 and 688 to the west of the Capitol. (See Fig, 36) He stated that it was the duty of the Secretary of the Interior to purchase from the owners at a price not exceeding its actual cash value, “as may be mutually agreed upon between the Secretary and such owners” and not exceeding the appraisal made by Ould in 1861. Further, that before this payment is made, the owners of the property, “shall, by good and sufficient deed or deeds, in due form of law… fully release and convey to the United States all their and each of their several and respective rights in said titles to such lands and properties so purchased.” In addition, if the Secretary of the Interior and the owners are not able to agree on a price, it is his
duty to make an application to the Supreme Court to decide the cash value of the property. When presenting the bill, Senator Morrill argued that the passage of the bill was a measure of sheer economy. He explained that if the government had purchased the squares when they were first proposed, they could have been obtained for half the price for which they could be obtained now. He stated that “it is so obviously a matter of economy, that if ever these squares are to be incorporated in the public grounds it should be done now.”

While support for the bill was far greater in the Senate than the House, it was hardly unanimous. Although both houses had a Republican majority, sectional divisions within the party influenced the support or opposition of the bill. Republican Senators from the West protested against any improvements to the Capitol on the grounds that the removal of the national capital to the west was imminent. In 1866, Senator Jacob Howard of Michigan claimed there was no necessity in spending money to enlarge the grounds as vast tracts of free land were available in the Mississippi Valley. In 1870, in response to Morrill’s bill, Senator James Harland of Iowa presented a petition from the Iowa state legislature, objecting improvements to the Capitol because the removal to a “more central and eligible position” in the West is “only a question of time.” Senator Harlan believed that there was no necessity in enlarging the grounds as it is “but a luxury” and a “proposition to enhance the members of Congress and other officers of the Government, and strangers who may visit the Capitol, at the publics expense.” Senator Yates of Illinois agreed with Senator Harlan, as he viewed the future of nation laid in the west. He expressed his
western bias when rhetorically questioning “does New England desire to have the
capital right under her fingers?”188

While Senator Morrill and those who supported the bill insisted that it was a
“matter of economy”, Morrill also argued that the neglect of the grounds is damaging
to the character and stability of the government itself. He stated that “it is for the
credit of the government, for the credit of our people, that we shall not put up such a
building as this” and “say that we are not even able to fence it or put in decent and
comely shape.” Another supporter, Republican Henry Winslow Corbett of Oregon,
argued that the development of the grounds would take time, and therefore he
regarded it

As economy to obtain this additional ground as soon as possible, that we may
plant trees and beautify the space in a manner commensurate with the beauty
of the Capitol and the grandeur of this Government, and to meet the
expectations of the people who visit the capital. We know that all the citizens
of the United States who visit the capital expect to see that not only the
Capitol, but the grounds are beautiful and something beyond anything else in
the United States.189

Although Senator Corbett was from Oregon, and thus is regional location may
suggest that he would support the relocation of the Capitol, he had moved to Oregon
from Massachusetts to pursue commercial interests in banking and railroads. Thus his
Republican, commercial interests informed his support of the strength of the federal
government.190
Democratic Senator John Potter Stockton of New Jersey also supported the passage of the bill. He condemned fellow Democrat Eugene Casserly of California for complaining of the lack of public parks in Washington, yet objecting to the appropriation on account of the future costs. Casserly also referred to historic precedent regarding the mismanagement of funds for public grounds. He claimed that “no similar expenditure in authentic history has produced results so slender as the moneys expended on the public grounds of the city of Washington.” Senator Stockton’s response suggested that this project was incomparable to any other in the city as “we want this investment not for mere pleasure-grounds to recreate in, as has been said in this debate, but for the health of the people… in order that all the people of the country may feel that proper pride in the capital of the country that they ought to feel.”

From the rhetoric of the debate, it is evident that the Northern congressmen, regardless of political party attributed their support for the improvement of the grounds to the interests of the nation as a whole. In contrast, the congressmen from the South and West objected to the project because of the massive expenditure that it would entail. To these men, whose interest lay primarily outside of Washington, it was believed that the taxpayer’s money should be spent on the people, and not for the self-aggrandizement of the federal government. It was the republican ideology which connected physical space and beautification with public enrichment that influenced decisions to improve the Capitol. To Republicans, prospects of an improved Capitol gave hope to an improved American society.
On March 5, 1872, Senator Morrill once again proposed the bill to enlarge the grounds, hoping that his efforts would finally prove successful. Morrill’s amendment passed the Senate, but in the House it led to a long debate. Norton P. Chipman, a delegate from the District of Columbia, was the leading advocate of the amendment. He claimed that the moment one’s view leaves the building itself, it rests upon the surroundings “which not only diminish the beauty of the building, but present and a standing reproach and disgrace to the whole people of this country.” Chipman continued that the people of the District have made a loan of $4,000,000 for the purpose of beautifying and improving the capital city, and that the “people appreciate the importance of the of the Capitol building itself as a central figure in this plan of improvement.” He also added, that as long as the boundaries of the Capitol are disputed, the monumental core of the city will remain unimproved and unsought for by investors in real estate.192

While the House failed to reach an agreement on that day, a month later on April 12, 1872, the House narrowly passed an amended version of the bill. Congress appropriated 400,000 dollars for the purchase of the additional lots.193 After two decades of discussion, the Capitol grounds would finally receive the professional attention that they had deserved.
Chapter III—Frederick Law Olmsted

On January 22, 1874, Senator Justin Smith Morrill of Vermont proposed to hire landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted to survey and create a landscape design for the Capitol grounds. Senator Morrill suggested Olmsted because of his association with New York City’s Central Park. He stated that “it is also desirable that we should have the best artistic talent in the country to furnish the proper plans; and I know of no person who is superior to Mr. Olmsted of New York, who had the charge of the Central Park of that city.” Further, as Morrill correctly assumed, “I take it there will be no objection to the passage of this bill proposing to employ such a man as Mr. Olmsted” and the bill subsequently passed without amendment. The current architect, Edward Clark was relieved by the prospect that Olmsted would take charge of the Capitol grounds. Clark reported to Congress, “not having any practice or pretensions to skill as a landscape designer… I earnestly recommend that a first class artist in this line may be employed to plan, plant and lay out the grounds.”

Before the bill passed, Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts raised one concern. Senator Sumner asked Morrill and the Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds whether they “had come to any conclusion regarding the trees” and urged the committee to “act courageously with regard to those trees.” Senator Sumner recognized that the trees he spoke of, located on the east side of the Capitol, obstructed views of the building and even recommended that they be at least thinned out “as not essentially to interfere with the sight of one of the most magnificent structures of the globe.” However, his concern for the removal of trees at the Capitol
site reflected a greater concern for the preservation of the site’s historical past. The “piecemeal” approach to improving the grounds had left the grounds as a physical relic of the architects and designers who had contributed to their development from the inception of the building. Until Olmsted, the grounds had been the creation of an additive process. The prospect of giving control of the grounds to a single designer, allowing him to decimate their existing arrangement in order to replace it with a singular vision, would have been troubling to some Congressmen and Senators. It would have been particularly disconcerting to a Senator such as Charles Sumner, who had served as a Senator in Washington, D.C on and off since 1851, and had witnessed the development of the building and grounds first hand. However, the appointment of a single man to resolve the problems presented by the grounds was a typical approach for handling elements of reconstruction under the Republican administration.

The fact that Senator Morrill had appointed Olmsted without any competition for the commission also added to the undemocratic nature of the project. William Allen noted that this signified a fundamental change in the way in which architectural and design services were provided to Congress. In addition to daily duties, the architect of the Capitol would also supervise the work of consultants hired to perform large design tasks. It also marked the beginning of a century long practice of hiring consulting architects and designers without any competition.197

After nearly two decades of discussion and nearly a century of improper care, the Capitol grounds were about to receive the sophisticated treatment that would compliment the grandeur of the Capitol building. With the nearing completion of the building, it was apparent that the Capitol could no longer remain in an unfinished
state. What would distinguish Olmsted’s treatment of the grounds from the earlier management of the grounds was the application of a cohesive design with an artistic approach that served to consciously enhance the presentation of the building and restore L’Enfant’s monumental vision of the city that had previously been lost.

A Suitable Man for the Job

By 1873, Frederick Law Olmsted had acquired a national reputation as a landscape designer. Olmsted brought over fifteen years of experience in landscape design to his work at the Capitol. After travelling to England in 1852 and publishing Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England, Olmsted returned to the United States with an interest in landscape design and a desire to institute public parks in American cities. In 1857, the Board of Commissioners for New York City’s first rural and spacious public park, the Central Park, appointed Olmsted as superintendent. The commissioners were not a democratic body elected by the citizens of New York, but a “self perpetuating entity appointed by the state legislature.” They had the unprecedented ability to decide how Central Park should be designed and managed, which was the result of party politics. The realignment of political parties pitted the New York state legislature against the New York City municipal legislature and brought the Republicans, who then removed control of the park from the city and to the appointed Board of Commissioners.198

Various ideas about how the park should appear circulated among the commissioners and in the New York press. While many of the early proposals neglected to address the conception of a design, all agreed that Central Park must be
“beautiful, even magnificent” and measure up to the European models as a “worthy emblem of the city’s progress.” Even before the selection of the Board of Commissioners, Egbert Viele, who had been appointed to oversee the topographical survey, produced the first plan for the park. However, once the Board was in power, on October 13, 1857, it issued a competition that offered monetary prizes for the top four plans for the “laying out the park.” In 1858, British born architect Calvert Vaux, invited Olmsted to join him in designing a plan for the park. Olmsted and Vaux’s “Greensward plan”, won the public competition over thirty-three other competing plans. (Fig. 39)

Despite their equal contributions to the design, the commissioners of Central Park granted Olmsted the singular title as Architect-in-Chief, while Vaux was named first an assistant and later received the title of consulting architect. His newly created office consolidated both the superintendents and the chief engineers. Olmsted’s duties, which were not specifically those of a designer, included hiring and directing labor and policing of the park. After receiving the appointment, Olmsted presented himself as the park’s “representative man.” Olmsted’s association as the steward of Central Park gained him national recognition.

In an essay read before the American Social Science Society in 1870, Olmsted reported the unprecedented social and financial benefits of the park. He asserted, “as to the effect on the public health, there is no question that it is already great” for the testimonies of the city’s physicians unanimously conceded that: “where I formerly ordered patients of a certain class to give up their business altogether and go out of town, I now often advise simply moderation, and prescribe a ride in the Park before
going to their offices, and again a drive with their families before dinner. Olmsted also assessed the park as an asset to the wealth of the city, claiming that the “park, moreover, has had a very marked effect in making the city attractive to visitors, and in thus increasing its trade, and causing many who have made fortunes elsewhere to take up their residence and become tax-payers in it.”

As early as 1861, the special committee appointed by the State Senate to investigate Central Park, acknowledged its direct financial advantage for the New York. Despite the committee’s reservations about the suitability of municipal corporations to purchasing land “on speculation,” members admitted that Central park “has been, and will be, in a merely pecuniary point of view, one of the wisest and most fortunate measures undertaken by the City of New York. It has already more than quadrupled the value of a large extent of property in its vicinity.” In 1875, the committee estimated that the city had amassed nearly four million dollars annually in “excess of the taxes collected as a direct result of the development of the park.”

There was no denying the positive impact Central Park had on the city of New York and its citizens.

Following the success of Central Park, Olmsted’s popular affiliation with the park earned him numerous public and private commissions. By 1873, Olmsted and his partner Vaux had received many prominent commissions across the country. In addition to their ongoing work at Central Park, Olmsted and Vaux designed public parks such as Prospect Park in Brooklyn (1866) and Delaware Park in Buffalo (1869) and residential communities such as Riverside, Illinois (1869). They also introduced
scenic parkways to the United States with the Eastern and Ocean parkways in Brooklyn (1868), and South Parkway Boulevard in Chicago (1871).\textsuperscript{206}

While serving as Architect in Chief at Central Park, Olmsted displayed his dedication to the park and proved his efficiency as an administrator in organizing and overseeing the application of his design. On May 17, 1858, Olmsted was appointed “Chief Executive officer” of the board, “by or through whom all work on the Park shall be executed, and shall have the government and supervision of all employees at the Park.”\textsuperscript{207} In response to his appointment, Olmsted wrote to the board asserting that “I hold myself responsible to the Board as an undivided body. I have asked favors of no party and of no man, and I acknowledge obligations in which the Park can be concerned to no party and to no man.”\textsuperscript{208} Olmsted also proved his ability to organize and mobilize large numbers of workers in order to efficiently implement his design. After one month in office, Olmsted reported to the board in regard to the organization and progress of work at the park, explaining that “a few short of one thousand men, on an average, have been at work during the week past” and that the “work is organized in divisions.”\textsuperscript{209} While serving as the superintendent, Olmsted had overseen the work of one thousand men. When he assumed the additional duty of Architect in Chief, he supervised workers and a department responsible for expanding millions of dollars.\textsuperscript{210}

Five months after his initial report, he reported that there were now two thousand three hundred men employed on the Park, and that the large forced had accomplished an impressive amount of work in such a short time. In an 1873 letter to
the Commissioners, Olmsted described what had been accomplished at the park in the
four years following his appointment as Architect in Chief:

Construction of roads and walks, arches and bridges, the formation of lakes,
greens and lawns, the changes of surface and the preparation and distribution
of soil on the rocky parts to be planted, [were] principally executed. The main
bodies of foliage were brought to a high state of provisional finish; the
nucleus of the keepers [Park police] was formed and instructed and certain
customs of public use were established, the rude and fundamental work
needed to the realization of the design was thus in great measure done and
some little more.\textsuperscript{211}

This drawing of a view of Central Park from 1875 shows how vast the park was and
attests to the amount of work Olmsted had accomplished. The image shows both the
rural, naturalistic aspects of the park and the architectural features such as Bethesda
fountain (Fig. 40 and 41) In addition to his artistic intuition as a landscape designer,
Olmsted also efficiently managed the various aspects of the park’s creation and
functioning. Because Olmsted himself did not physically create his landscapes, it was
important that he was able to assert his authority in directing others to construct his
own visions.

Olmsted had a specific conception of how he envisioned the public to use his
parks and his management of the park extended to ensuring the integrity of his vision.
Olmsted’s observations on park management in Europe and his desire to instill a
sense of order in the park caused him to devote great efforts into creating an adequate
police force. In 1860, the Senate Investigation Committee commended Olmsted’s disciplinary force as a

Well organized force of fifty men…mainly from among the foremen and mechanics employed in the construction of the park… they are neatly uniformed, are subject to military drills and discipline; and their well established efficiency and popularity evince the discrimination with which they have been selected and the care with which they are trained for the duty.²¹²

In addition to preventing crime, the main purpose of the police force was to ensure the proper use of the park as Olmsted had envisioned.

The Central Park Committee affirmed Olmsted’s notability as a designer and administrator in a report from 1861 in which they express their satisfaction: “the committee, with the view of a more thorough and detailed examination of the various departments of work at the Park…furnishes the highest testimony as to the character, efficiency, economy, and management of the work.”²¹³ Olmsted also accredited his own abilities at Central Park, for he said that “as to the organization and management of the work, I think it more credible to me than anything I have done publicly.”²¹⁴

Olmsted also demonstrated his ability to remain subordinate to his authorities despite his strong dissonance to the nature of his subjection. Although Olmsted initially enjoyed relative autonomy as Architect in Chief, he would soon find his artistic vision and authority undermined by the politics that controlled the upper management of the park. He attributed his extreme work ethic partly to his “rapidly growing hatred of New York politicians with whom all my work on the Park was a
His continuous conflicts with the Commissioners of the Park concerned three general areas: various schemes and proposals for altering the Greensward plan, various Commissioners attempts to make use of the park for political patronage, and his struggles with Andrew Green, Comptroller of the park, for control of the park’s work. His relationship with Andrew Green, who had been his strongest supporter when he was hired as superintendent but would later become his rival, is particularly illustrative of his professional subordination.

Throughout their growing hostilities, Roper wrote that “Olmsted strove to behave towards Green with scrupulous subordination.” Melvin Kalfus identified an example of Olmsted’s “scrupulous subordination” to Green in a disagreement they had over the destruction of some willow trees to make way for a drainage ditch. Green wrote to Olmsted with his concern for the cost of replacing trees: “It is quite expensive to get trees on the Park… and I hope nothing in [the] shape of a tree will be cut.” Olmsted initially dismissed Green’s complaint with a simple, yet dignified note. However, Olmsted later felt obligated to write a more extensive, “convoluted, and rather obeisant letter.” Olmsted wrote that he had always tried to inform Green of his intentions on all park matters, and allowed himself to be guided by Green’s opinion, not out of “official courtesy or duty, but only on a sincere respect for your final judgment an willingness to sacrifice my own convictions in matters of small consequence to maintain a hearty cooperation of will in our work.” He added that he had assumed that his own judgment should control the decision if there ever conflicted in opinion over a matter like this one. However, he stated that “If I am wrong… I only desire to be informed of it more scrupulously avoid the like error in
the future,” and that if Green did inform him, he would take care to not be “betrayed into neglecting or overstepping” his responsibility.219

Olmsted publicly denied existing contentions with Green, and only privately expressed his frustration. His complaints were mostly directed to his father, John Olmsted and his new wife, Mary Perkins Olmsted. He vented to Mary that Green “frets me with his manner of thinking himself so much more efficient than you or anybody else.”220 His private aggravation and suppression of his anger contributed to the deterioration of his own health. However, his oppression by the “systematic small tyranny” which he believed Green had subjected him, finally proved too much for Olmsted. In a letter to one of the park Commissioners, Henry Stebbins, Olmsted wrote that “I am convinced that I could not live through next summer if the Commissioners expect the same of me that they have hitherto.”221

On January 22, 1861, Olmsted submitted his resignation, which he subsequently withdrew at the request of the Commissioners. Kalfus notes that in his long presentation that explained his reasons for resigning, he was unable to openly express his dismay in “blunt, equivocal terms.” Kalfus explains that he struck out the following passage from the final version of his letter, which he apparently viewed to be too forthright of his convictions. He omitted: “the system of the park is one which, in some respects I do not at all approve, which I have no heart in, which I do not myself harmonize with, and in which I feel myself unable to succeed.” He also excluded any direct references to Andrew Green when discussing incidents that he regarded as “bureaucratic obstruction.” However, he maintained his respect and subordination to Green in his professional relationships. He wrote to one of the park
Commissioners, Charles Handy Russell, that “cooperation with Mr. Green, while he thus controls the park, so far as I can hope to yet influence it, is essential. I cannot counter-plot him. To charge upon him individually that for which the Commission is finally responsible, is unnecessary… To quarrel with him, while I am his official subordinate would be undignified and impolitic, and would be playing into the hands of the enemies of the park.” To Olmsted, the “enemies of the park” were the corrupt politics over the park’s patronage that threatened its development.

Following his work at Central Park, the architectural firm Olmsted, Vaux & Company became the nation’s leading landscape architecture firm. Across the nation, committees of gentlemen in major cities mobilized to create their own “central parks.” Rosenzweig and Blackmar suggest that Olmsted and the park boards most significant impact on the nation was its provision of a new administrative model for “comprehensive” city planning by executive commissions. It was Olmsted’s involvement with the administrative aspect of this success, combined with the credit he received for the park’s design that contributed to the firm’s prevalence.

Although Olmsted took no part in the campaign for the creation of the park or in the selection of the park site, Olmsted brought immense passion to his work and played a more important role in it’s construction than any other person involved in project. He was able to come into an existing project and transform it into his own through his ability to authoritatively exert his aesthetic and administrative vision. Olmsted’s persistent dedication and his authoritative methods of producing physical results were translatable to other causes such as his work at the Sanitary Commission in Washington, D.C.
For Olmsted, his mission for Central Park extended beyond providing New Yorkers with a recreational space. He viewed Central Park, and the creation of urban parks as an opportunity to impose social reform. He saw the park as beneficial for the health of citizens living in the city in that it provided recreational space and fresh air, a space to escape from the unsanitary and crowded conditions of urban life. He also believed his example of an artistic landscape would have a civilizing effect by training the tastes of the public. The park would instill a sense of community by providing a space for the public to gather and socialize in. He hoped the park would embody the values and manners that would improve the character of society. For Olmsted, his parks were an expression of social idealism that promoted a vision of a republican utopia.

Olmsted’s mission to implement social reform extended beyond his built environments. Olmsted viewed his efforts for social reform at Central park as a noble cause while the nation was at peace, but the war impelled him to seek a new sense of purpose. In the wake of the outbreak of the Civil War, Olmsted sought an active role in aiding the Union. An injury from a carriage accident years earlier left Olmsted handicapped and unable to physically exert his services. Roper noted that Olmsted “held it a religious duty to support the government in every possible way and did whatever came to hand.”

Olmsted, who came from an affluent Northeastern background, was a firm supporter of the Union. From 1852 through 1857, he travelled as a journalist through the South and to Texas, providing a detailed critique of the conditions of Southern
society in his published writings, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* (1856), *A Journey Through Texas* (1857), and *A Journey in the Back Country* (1860). In his travels, Olmsted investigated the negative economic implications of slavery and concluded that the causes of its inefficiency were based on the slave’s deprivation of liberty. His conservative solution, which revealed his northern bias, was to promote free labor in order to demonstrate that the condition of the laborer is not necessarily a servile one, and that the occupation of the laborer does not necessarily prevent intellectual and moral development. Although many of his concerns were economic based, he expressed a striking remark in a letter published in the *New York Times* in 1854. He denounced the theory that “the simple protection to capital and letting alone to native genius is not the whole duty of Government” but that the “aesthetic faculties need to be educated-drawn out; that taste and refinement need to be encouraged as well as the useful arts…” He continues by asserting that the “enemies of Democracy could bring no charge more severe against it.”

As early as 1854, Olmsted expressed one of the fundamental ideals of the Republican Party’s political ideologies. The Republicans promoted the federal government’s support of the amelioration of the public through internal improvements. Internal improvements such as railroads and canals would physically connect the country and promote a free market. The introduction of parks and open recreational spaces into urban areas would encourage community and social and moral refinement. Olmsted’s republican ideals would manifest in his patriotic support of the Union and the power of the federal government throughout the Civil War.
Although Olmsted was far from satisfied with the Republican administration throughout the war, the threat of Northern Democrats caused him to found the Union League Club in an effort to seek increased support for the war. Olmsted founded the Union League Club in New York in response to the Democrat sweep of the elections in New York in the fall of 1862. Olmsted saw the need for an organization composed of men who supported the war and the national government. The club intended to foster loyalty to the national government and promote national unity by opposing the principle of states rights. However, the club that came into existence in 1863 did not satisfy Olmsted’s vision of social and political reform. He believed that the organization lacked a strong political program and did not fulfill the educational role that he envisioned.228

Olmsted found a more fulfilling way to apply his patriotism and desire for social and political reform in his work at the Sanitary Commission in Washington, D.C. In his work at the Sanitary Commission, Olmsted demonstrated his ability to exert his influence independently yet in subordination to the federal government. In June of 1861, Olmsted took a leave of absence from his duties at Central Park to accept an appointment at the United States Sanitary Commission. The Commission had been formed independently by citizens in response to the inadequacy of the federal government’s agency, the Medical Bureau of the Army. The Sanitary Commission received no government funds, but functioned with the support of private donations. The Sanitary Commission sought to aid in the care of the large Union army, which had proven too large for the army’s small and outdated Medical Bureau. When the war began in 1861, there were only 16,000 men enlisted in the
United States Union Army. By the end of the war, the number would reach over one million officers and enlisted soldiers. The Sanitary Commission led a campaign to reorganize and expand the Medical Bureau and to replace the aging Surgeon General.

While serving as Executive Secretary of the Sanitary Commission, Olmsted displayed that his abilities as an efficient administrator could transcend the context of his landscape work. His service also demonstrated that his administrative capabilities could be adapted from the context of a municipality to the federal government. From the inception of the Commission, Olmsted worked with the commission “almost daily and nightly for a week to discuss its organization and its ends, form committees, draft appeals for funds and prepare a questionnaire on camp sanitation.” Once in Washington, Olmsted witnessed the incompetence of military organization under the Medical Department and the early failure of the Sanitary Commission to make an impact on the war effort. When Olmsted arrived in Washington D.C with the Sanitary Commission, he found the state of the organization as skeletal, as it only consisted of the board of Commissioners. The federal government was also initially skeptical of the Commission. After the President of the Commission, Henry Bellows secured the consent of support and recognition from the acting Surgeon General Robert C. Wood in May 1861, by early June, it had be countermanded by the newly appointed Surgeon General, Clement A. Finley. Finley only agreed to authorize the Commission if it agreed to restrict its activities to the volunteer army. On June 13, 1861, President Abraham Lincoln signed the executive order with hesitance, as he characterized the Commission as a “fifth wheel” to the existing government agencies.
Olmsted was responsible for the basic organizational structure that would serve the Commission. He structured the central office with a clear delineation of responsibilities. By relying on both the delegation of powers and central coordination, the Sanitary Commission was able to efficiently respond to crisis, such as major battles. Charles Beveridge points out that “such an organization” with its “large specialized cadre of employees” was almost unheard of in any benevolent organizations at the time. The bureaucratic organization, which emphasized professional management was more sophisticated than most commercial businesses. Further, Beveridge states that the only bureaucracies with comparable organizational systems were the railroad system and the United States government.232

Olmsted regarded that the services of the Sanitary Commission extended beyond the immediate provision of aid and care for the wounded soldiers. In a letter to Charles Loring Brace he wrote that “you are greatly mistake if you mean that you think that the distribution of supplies is its “great work.” It is a mere incident of its work.”233 He saw the mission of the Sanitary Commission to initiate reform policies that would restructure the existing Medical Bureau. He believed that the only way for the soldiers to receive adequate care was by “a general reform, enlargement and vitalization of the Medical Bureau” through the appointment of a new surgeon general, one who would be “big hearted and energetic.” Olmsted and the Commission successfully introduced bills that reformed the method of appointing the surgeon general. In April 1862, Congress passed a medical reform bill that required the President to appoint the surgeon general from the “ranks of the medical staff on the basis of merit rather than seniority.”234
Olmsted was publically credited for his service at the Sanitary Commission. His ability to work cooperatively with the federal government without overstepping its authority was a feat recognized by the nation. An 1866 New York Tribune article praised Olmsted for his administrative skills, which the article attributes as the foundation of the Commission’s success. The article acknowledged that the Commission was charged with the “delicate and difficult task of determining exactly where the government’s responsibility ended and the Commission’s began” but were fortunate that the matter was in the hands of “one whose studies and experience had thoroughly trained him in a science, little understood in this country, that of administration.” It further commended Olmsted’s ability to be “accountable to his superior office for the thorough and faithful performance of that particular portion of the work, and nothing more.”235 Olmsted’s influence at the Sanitary Commission established his ability to rise above the bureaucratic nature of politics for his dedication to the greater cause.

It was in Washington that Olmsted met his earliest supporter of his involvement in the creation of a landscaped space for the capital city. During his service at the Sanitary Commission, Olmsted met Montgomery C. Meigs, the quartermaster general of the Union army. By 1861, Meigs had resumed his role as supervisor of the construction of the Capitol extension and dome. Charles Beveridge notes that from their initial meeting, Meigs and Olmsted found each other congenial. Meigs recalled Olmsted’s “joyful expression” when “comparing our opinions and views as to the manner in which the [Sanitary] Commission could best fulfill its objects of usefulness.” Olmsted had declared that from the Commission’s inception, it
found the quartermaster’s department to be the most cooperative branch of the army. He added that “the hospitality of no other single man was worth as much to our undertaking as that of Major-General M.C Meigs.” Their professional relationship continued even after Olmsted left Washington. In 1866, Meigs encouraged Olmsted to apply for the position of Commissioner of Public Buildings in the District of Columbia as “a step towards securing a public park for Washington.” Beveridge also notes that Meigs sought Olmsted’s advice for suitable landscaping of the national cemeteries and secured his services for projects including the grounds for the Jeffersonville Depot in Indiana and the Schuylkill Arsenal in Philadelphia.

Despite his prior experiences, landscaping the Capitol grounds presented an unprecedented type of project for Olmsted. It was the first project that he designed and executed without the assistance of his partner, Calvert Vaux after they terminated their partnership in 1872 for “reasons of mutual convenience.” The nature of the commission and its established objectives was unprecedented among any of Olmsted’s prior projects. None of his previous work had involved designing a landscape around a preexisting building. The purpose of his design for the landscape of the Capitol grounds was to provide the Capitol building with a setting that enhanced its appearance and accommodate convenient access to the building. Unlike his prior designs that treated architectural features as subordinate to the landscape, the Capitol grounds presented Olmsted with the converse task. Olmsted’s treatment of the Capitol grounds would require him to retract some of his design principles to better serve the building. Olmsted’s design had to unify the site by bringing the grounds in accordance with the grandeur of the building. As an accompanying space to the
building, the grounds both required and deserved the same professional treatment that the Capitol had received for nearly one hundred years.

In order to improve the grounds beyond simple ornamentation, the project required a designer with an understanding of the difficulties presented by the topography of the landscape. It also required a landscape gardener with astute knowledge of horticulture and its pertinence to the present topography. In order to transform the grounds from their simplistic and unflattering state to a sophisticated landscape, the site needed a landscape designer with both practical and artistic capabilities.

In addition, because of the complex nature of federal government patronage, the designer had to possess the administrative capabilities in order to see through that the design is implemented as envisioned. Further, the designer needed to present and assert his plan so that Congress would approve of the necessary appropriations.

**Justin Smith Morrill**

Justin Smith Morrill of Vermont served as both a Representative and Senator in Washington for forty-four consecutive years before his death in 1898. He was elected as a Whig representative for the 34th Congress in March 1855 and as a Republic representative for the five succeeding congresses until March 1865. After the death of Senator Jacob Collamer of Vermont in 1865, he was offered the appointment to that seat, but declined due to his desire to be elected according to the new regulations on Senator elections. In 1866, Congress passed a bill that required state legislatures to elect senators by an absolute majority. Morrill was subsequently
elected as a Union Republican Senator in 1866 and was reelected as a Republican senator in 1872 and held this position until his death in 1898. While Senator, he served as Chairman of the Senate committee on public buildings from 1871 to 1875, and continued to be a leading member on the committee until 1898.

Morrill is best remembered as a firm proponent of public education and the study of agriculture, as author of the “College Land Bill” that created land-grant colleges. But he also worked to promote cultural and educational institutions, such as when he succeeded in preserving the Old Hall of the House of Representatives as a National Statuary Hall. Morrill also advocated for the beautification of Washington: he supported the continuation of construction on the Washington Monument as well as the removal of the Library of Congress and the Supreme Court respectively, to new buildings at Capitol square.

Throughout the course of his career in Washington, Morrill devoted much of his energy to beautifying Washington. As a leading influential figure in the Senate, he introduced visions of a monumental capital through his support of the city’s physical development. According to fellow Vermont Senator William P. Dillingham, it was the “dream of Senator Morrill’s life to make Washington the most beautiful capital city of the world.” He was the first Senator to both have this vision and devote his efforts in the Senate to see it carried through. While the legislative movement to improve the physical appearance of the city would not form until 1903 with the Senate Park Commission, Senator Morrill possessed a vision of the city that many of his contemporary colleagues did not have. During his eight-year involvement with the Capitol grounds, he was also considering the improvement of the National Mall.
When the Senate introduced a bill to permit the Pennsylvania Railroad to pass through the Mall on 6th street, Morrill strongly opposed the measure. As Chairman of the Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds, he fought against the committee only to be defeated. It is noted that this was his only defeat that he suffered during his eight years of service as chairman. Thirty-five years later, it would cost the government one million five hundred thousand dollars to remove the same tracks that Morrill had so vehemently opposed.241

Morrill’s support of public improvements in Washington may have been motivated by his “sense of place” as he had resided in the city since his first congressional appointment in 1854. After his first election to the Senate, he decided to build a second home in Washington and hired Edward Clark to design the house on a corner lot at number one Thomas circle, located north and east of the Capitol. His appointment as the chairman of the Committee of Public buildings and grounds in 1871 gave him the opportunity to exert his authority towards beautifying the city he had adopted as a second home. In a speech given in support of improvements to the Capitol, Morrill admitted, “I confess… to a feeling of reverence for this Capitol, where I have spent so many years of my life.” However, Morrill’s patriotic Republicanism instilled within him a reverence for the city as early as in 1841, when he first visited Washington. He expressed his admiration for the Capitol architecture’s and influence on the city, writing in that year that “the Capitol is a credit to the nation. The architectural proportions are superb. The interior is arranged very ingeniously and with great solidity. The sculpture, the paintings and costly trappings are worth a look… The grounds, nature and art, have nearly made perfect.” His
support of the development of government buildings reflected Morrill’s “desire to make Capitol square one of the most noted public squares in the world.” However, he also criticized the city- “Who has not heard of the overshadowing influence of the “executive,” and the close-connexion said to exist with the House of Congress. But after a walk on a hot day from the President’s mansion to the capitol, I confess I was far from discerning the close-connexion-but really believe they were at a “magnificent distance” apart.”

However, as a Senator in post-Civil War Washington, Morrill witnessed a very different city from his first visit in 1841. The population had grown to 126,000 in 1867, which was nearly double the population in pre-war years. The war had a physical effect on the city, leaving Washington in a state of ruin. New York Tribune editor Horace Greely described the post-war capital as a city where “the rents are high, the food is bad, the dust is disgusting, the mud is deep, and the morals are deplorable.”

Morrill recognized the symbolic importance of the capital’s beautification for the benefit of the people. He asserted that “Washington is to be no mean city. It is the capital of the people; and its public building and grounds belong to the Nation, and they will be jealously guarded as the apple of its eye.”

Morrill’s involvement with the beautification of Washington reflected his patriotism and support of the Union. As a senator from Vermont, where “to be a Republican was almost the same as being a patriot,” Morrill adamantly supported the Republican cause. But above all he was a patriot, who supported preservation of the union. Morrill’s dedication to the Republican Party and the Union and his history as a influential figure in both Congress and the Senate gained both respect and power.
in the Senate during his later career, which undoubtedly enabled him to secure the support of his colleagues. Although it is clear that his patriotism and history of promoting the improvement of public buildings in Washington may have influenced Morrill’s support of beautifying the Capitol grounds, regional interests may have also motivated his promotion of these projects. In the early twentieth century, Vermont was the second largest producer of marble, granite and slate in the country. In 1887, the Vermont Marble Company received the contract for the construction of the marble terraces and principal stairway of the Capitol’s west front.\textsuperscript{246} Morrill had a history of promoting Vermont’s economic interest. Morrill was one of the few Republican who opposed the Tariff of 1857 that intended to reduce the taxes on imports. He argued against the bill on the ground that it did not give sufficient protection to Vermont wool.\textsuperscript{247}

It is not surprising that Morrill played a major role in obtaining appropriations for the improvement of the Capitol grounds because of his political background and history of supporting public improvements in Washington. However, his personal role in securing Frederick Law Olmsted as the designer for the Capitol grounds may have been motivated by their shared nationalism and promotion of social reform. By 1873, Olmsted had become the leading proponent of the movement to integrate public parks into urban areas. The advantage of introducing parks into cities was twofold. A park would both benefit the public as a form of social reform and it would beautify the city, which would reflect the development and establishment of the increasingly urban nation. Only a professional landscape architect could realize Morrill’s vision of Washington as the monumental city that L’Enfant had planned. Olmsted’s fame from
his association with Central Park, his reputation as an efficient administrator and his political and social ideologies made him the most viable candidate of any other landscape architects practicing at this time.

In May of 1873, Senator Morrill wrote to Olmsted inviting him to Washington to meet with Edward Clark, architect of the Capitol about developing a new design for the Capitol grounds. In his letter, Morrill propositioned Olmsted, writing, “I hope you may feel sufficient interest in this rather national subject…not to have it botched.”

It wasn’t until March 1874 that Congress appropriated two hundred thousand dollars for the improvement of the grounds and on June 23, 1874 that Olmsted was placed official responsible for the landscaping of the grounds.

Edward Clark, the current architect of the Capitol, who had been appointed architect of the Capitol extension, replacing Thomas U. Walter in 1865, fully supported the employment of a landscape designer. In 1867, Clark expressed his own recommendations to extend the boundaries to C street north and South to ultimately connect the grounds with the Mall and the grounds surrounding the President’s House. He envisioned carriage drives connecting the parks by a system of roads, bridges and underpasses that would allow the carriages to run “almost from the Capitol the President’s mansion without touching a paved road.”

Annual report of the Architect of the Capitol Extension,” 1868, However, he acknowledged that the necessary work was beyond his abilities, and asserted that “not having any practice or pretentions in skill as landscape gardener, I earnestly recommend that a first-class artist in this line may be employed to plan, plant, and lay out these grounds.”
Clark had begun leveling the grounds, filling in, and smoothing the earth before Olmsted’s plan was approved, but more work remained to be done. In 1867, Congress appropriated twenty thousand dollars for grading, removing work sheds, and improving the grounds and streets surrounding the Capitol. Under an amendment to the bill, the appropriation was to be expended under the direction of Clark. In years past, the improvements to the grounds would have been under the supervision of the commissioner of public building. The grounds had been under the direction of the commissioner or board of public buildings since George Washington first appointed the board in 1791. William C. Allen suggests that the Radical Republicans in Congress abolished the position, which had been currently held by Benjamin B. French, as away of punishing French for his loyalty to President Andrew Johnson. Before eventually placing the grounds under Clark’s direction, Congress first transferred the duties of the commissioner of public buildings to the chief engineer of the army, General A.A. Humphreys, who appointed General Nathaniel Michler engineer in charge of public buildings and grounds.

Olmsted also recognized the current mismanagement of the public grounds and the extent to which politics interfered with the development of the site. Olmsted express his dismay in a letter to William Hammond Hall from March 28th, 1874, he wrote that the public grounds in Washington were managed “in an absurd and wasteful way under advice and control of nearly a dozen independent Committees of Congress, assisted by nearly as many heads of bureaus and other officials, architects, surveyors and gardeners.” Further, he urged that before any work is begun on the Capitol grounds, an effort should be made “to simplify and consolidate the present...
organizations.” Olmsted suggested that a board of three professional landscape architects, William Hammond Hall, Horace Cleveland and Jacob Weidenmann should oversee the project.252

Upon visiting Washington after his appointment, Olmsted expressed a similar observation to that which Senator Morrill had made in 1841. He discerned that Washington’s government buildings lacked a physical connection that gave the city a fragmented appearance. The public buildings, which were designed to give the impression of unity and dignity, were undermined by the condition of the surrounding grounds. Olmsted noted that “in short the capital of the Union manifests nothing so much as disunity.” He suggested that the Capitol grounds should not be considered as a separate entity, but rather should be treated in connection with the adjacent public grounds, which reached as far as the White House. On what would become the Mall and along its borders stood buildings occupied by the State, Justice, Treasury, War, Navy and Agriculture departments and the Smithsonian Institution. However, the grounds were neglected and intruded on by “numerous commonplace and inferior structures.” This stretch of land, known as the Canal district which would later become the National Mall, stood as a “dreary waste through which oozed the stinking waters of Tiber creek.”253 Olmsted wanted to landscape the public grounds extending from the Capitol to the White House in order to impose a system of order, which would create a “federal bond.”254 Congress rejected the extensive plan and Olmsted was limited to the Capitol grounds. However, Morrill had been a supporter of Olmsted’s greater vision of the urban layout of Washington. In the summer of 1874, Morrill and Olmsted conferred with civic reformer Dorman B. Eaton on the
improvement of public spaces throughout the capital. Morrill wrote to Olmsted that “in the end I hope you may have something to do with these also... but at preset we must wait.”
Chapter 4--The Design

When Frederick Law Olmsted arrived in Washington in 1874, he saw the capital city in a state of reconstruction. The Capitol site that Olmsted saw overlooked substandard housing units and temporary structures to the north, south and east of the site. (Fig. 42) The west overlooked the barren, undeveloped Mall. In this photograph from 1863 that shows a view westward from the Capitol, an array of buildings and disjointed spaces compose the National Mall. (Fig. 43) Though public improvements had been delayed by the Civil War, in the postwar period, the federal government recognized that new public works projects and investments would affirm the city’s future. In 1867, the municipal government established a Board of Public Works to oversee utilitarian and ornamental improvements throughout the city. Restoring confidence in the reunited nation during this reconstruction period was a “symbolic task as well as a concern of political substance.”256 And it was in this context that Olmsted was appointed to landscape the grounds surrounding the Capitol building. Thus, it was a political decision for the federal government to invest in the completion of the Capitol site during a time when the government was physically reconstructing the country and reconstructing themselves as senators and congressmen from seceded states returned to Washington. This ideology was also expressed in the program of internal improvements to beautify and modernize the city, which like the outcome of the Civil War, reflected the triumph of urban, northern interests.
For nearly a century, the Capitol site existed in a state of disorder. The prior attempts to realize the site’s completion once the building was considered finished, failed to unify the space into a collective whole. In contrast to the earlier considerations of the grounds, with Olmsted’s design, the grounds were treated as constituent to the building. Olmsted’s plan improved the conditions of the space to better serve the presentation of the building. His plan brought order to the grounds by implementing a unified, aesthetic design. By integrating the building and grounds into a cohesive space, Olmsted’s design introduced a sense of unity to the site.

The implementation of Olmsted’s design was only possible with the expansion of the grounds and regulation of its boundaries. After twenty years of debate over how far, and in what direction the grounds should be expanded, the grounds were extended to form a perfect square with the Capitol building at its center. In 1872, the boundaries of the grounds were extended between First street east and west in the following manner: “northwardly to the south side of north B street, and southwardly to the north side of south B street, including in addition to so much of the reservations, avenues, and streets as are necessary for such extension, the two squares… Nos. 687 and 688.”257 The expansion of the boundaries increased the area of the grounds from thirty acres to fifty-six acres, making the shape of the grounds a perfect square.258 Ironically, the extension restored the grounds’ boundaries to what had originally been delineated in the 1803 plat, with the exception of lots 687 and 688. (Fig. 44)

It has been repeated in countless histories that L’Enfant’s visionary plan had been abandoned only to be resurrected in the early twentieth century by the efforts of
professional architects during the City Beautiful Movement, which developed Washington into a modern, monumental city. It is true that by the 1840’s, Washington had failed to develop into the grand city that L’Enfant had imagined. Nowhere was this failure more apparent that along the central axis of the city which L’Enfant had designated as a “grand avenue,” a public green space that extended from the Capitol to the Potomac. While published descriptions from as early as 1791 referred to the space as a “Mall” and “Pleasure Park,” by the 1840’s, the space was neither an avenue nor a park. Rather, it was an unkempt wasteland that undermined the early internal development that occurred at this time.

However, it was in the second half of the nineteenth century that a massive campaign to develop the city’s infrastructure combined with a “new craze for public statues” that transformed the city into a resemblance of L’Enfant’s intended monumentality. One guidebook from the 1870’s asserted that the ideas of L’Enfant and the founders were finally being realized “after a sleep of more than three quarters of a century.”259 By the turn of the twentieth century, the reinterpretation of L’Enfant’s vision turned the city’s urban landscape with its multitude of trees, parks, and monuments into the source of local and national pride. Margaret E. Farrar suggested that the reason why L’Enfant’s plan failed to be realized was because its embodiment of national unity and that spirit simply did not exist throughout most of the nineteenth century. The individual states were divided over issues of commerce and slavery and did not place much trust or investment into the national capital.260 Since appropriations to improve the city were determined by Congressmen who cared more for their native states than the embellishment of Capitol, it is not surprising that
many opposed improvements to the Capitol grounds that would require large expenditures.

In a June 1874 letter to Senator Justin Morrill and Senator James H. Platt, Chairman of the Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds, Olmsted explained his concept. The Capitol grounds, he noted, were “an adjunct of the Capitol Building and throughout their design the purpose of furthering, supporting, and supplementing the design of the building, in respect both to convenience and to architectural effect is to be everywhere to be held clearly in view.” Because the building was of imposing dimensions, moreover, “everything on the ground should answer to and sustain this character. The elements of the plan must be as few, large and simple as they will be consistently with convenience.”²⁶¹ From looking Olmsted’s design from 1875, these design principles are visibly evident. (Fig. 45) The design is defined by paths of circulation that form few, large spaces. Although Olmsted regarded that all elements of his design must be subservient to the building, his understanding of the grounds and building as a coordinated site informed his design ideology at the Capitol grounds.

Olmsted’s principal duty at the grounds was to create a more sophisticated setting for the Capitol building. Although the grounds had been arranged and planted in the past, there was no artistry in its design. The greenery had been planted without proper knowledge of the limitations of its use and the arrangement of the plantings were simple and artless. In an engraving of the east front of the Capitol that shows the principal eastern approach to the building, it is apparent that the trees are situated in linear rows, lining either side of the approach. (See Fig. 33) The image shows that the
only way that the trees were implemented on the eastern grounds was for the
delineation of the approaches.

In order to bring the grounds in harmony with the architectural grandeur of the
building, the site needed an artist to elevate the grounds from their purely ornamental
and pragmatic purpose. The grounds needed a designer with the capability of uniting
the practical necessities with an aesthetic vision. It is evident from Olmsted’s
comprehension of the site’s shortcomings and his proposed solutions that he
interpreted his task as that of elevating the site as a whole to that of the grandeur of
the building. With the Capitol extensions and dome completed in 1867, the building
was architecturally complete. (Fig. 46) However, from Olmsted’s analysis of the
deficiencies of the site, it is apparent that the presentation of the building was visually
imperfect.

The key to Olmsted’s success in his design for the Capitol grounds was his
thorough understanding of the history and physical conditions of the site. In a
comprehensive report from 1882, Olmsted traced this history to explain how the
grounds evolved into its present “sylvan juvenility.” His report was largely based
on conversations with John Blake, who had served as Commissioner of Public
grounds from 1855 until 1861. Olmsted’s extensive knowledge of horticulture also
enabled him to assess the conditions of every tree on the site and informed his
understanding of the appropriate plantings for the topography and climate of the land.
Olmsted’s astute comprehension of the evolution of the grounds throughout their
history allowed him to propose a design that responded to the persisting deficiencies.
Olmsted recognized that the grounds’ size, topography, and challenging circulation system would put “ordinary landscape gardening ideals of breadth and repose of surface applicable to a park or private residence grounds, to a great degree out of the question.” Circulation patterns at the Capitol grounds presented a particular challenge. Twenty-one streets adjoined the site, which contained some forty-six carriage and foot entrances. In addition, the grounds covered only fifty-eight acres, which paled in comparison to Central Park, which totaled eight hundred and forty three acres. Because the building was so large and the area of the grounds comparatively small, Olmsted stated that the elements of the design must be “few, large and simple” so not to distract from the main feature of the grounds, the building itself. In order for the grounds to properly adorn the Capitol building, Olmsted realized that his design would have to address specific contextual issues. First, his design would need to resolve the aesthetic problems caused by the topography of the site that prevented the proper presentation of the grounds and the building. Second, in creating a new physical environment for the Capitol, his design would have to evoke the democratic ideals that the building represented.

In an essay from 1875 entitled “Park,” Olmsted addressed specific landscape concerns regarding public buildings and systems of transition in urban plans. He wrote that

Public buildings can be reconciled with purposes of a park only in a limited degree. Ground about any building designed for an important public service should be laid out with a view, first, to convenience of communication with it; secondly, to its best exhibition as a work of architectural art. The neighboring
grounds should be shaped and planted in strict subordination to these purposes, which will involve an entirely different arrangement from that which the purpose of forming a quiet rural retreat would prescribe.

He also specified the most favorable conditions for systems of transition in cities. In his recommendation, he emphasized convenience.

Neatness and maintenance of orderly conduct among visitors becomes also exceedingly difficult. Hence, as a rule, at least in the United States, public grounds designed with this motive become more forlorn than open places would be. It is much better to decorate them in such a manner as will not destroy their openness or cause inconvenience to those who have occasion to cross them. For this purpose their plan should be simple and generally formal in style.265

It is apparent in Olmsted’s design that he implemented these principles in regards to the grounds.

In an article in the *New York Daily Tribune* from December 5, 1874, Olmsted explained that his design would first, provide convenient approaches to and around the Capitol, and second, “allow its imposing dimensions and the beauty of its architecture to have due effect” and to “aid and heighten that effect.”266 The design problem at the Capitol grounds “hinged on the fact that these grounds were not their own justification; they were supportive to the Capitol building and subsidiary to it.” The purpose of the grounds was not the usual one of “securing breadth and repose of landscape effects.”267 Rather, they served a more pragmatic and symbolic purpose.
Olmsted identified three principal weaknesses at the site. First, the placement of trees obstructed full perspective views of the Capitol because they were not planted in accordance to proportions of the new building. The trees undermined the monumentality of the building because visitors were unable to fully view the dignified forms of its architecture. Second, Olmsted also viewed the present system of approaches to the building as inadequate. Prior to Olmsted’s design, the walkways were laid out in a linear, yet indirect way. Third, the placement of the building on the edge of the hill gave it a low and unstable appearance.

After Senator Morrill’s initial invitation to develop a plan in the spring of 1873, Olmsted visited Washington twice in 1874 to assess the current conditions of the Capitol grounds. Morrill and Olmsted continued a sporadic correspondence over the following months, in which Olmsted updated Morrill on his preliminary design. In a letter to Morrill from January 22, 1874, Olmsted gave his initial impression of the problems that he had observed at the Capitol and in the city. First, he asserted the motives behind the improvement of the grounds. These observations recalled the intentions of L’Enfant’s original plan for the city. He observed that the public buildings throughout Washington represent an investment “by the Nation of Millions of dollars, made solely with the view of producing certain impressions upon the mind of observers.” He claimed that had this “outlay been wisely and comprehensively directed to the purpose in view,” no nation in the world would possess a capital as noble and fitting as Washington. However, the existing conditions of the buildings produced an effect that is “broken, confused and unsatisfactory… and is unhappily often alluded to as a standing reproach against the system of government which has
been able to secure no better adaptation of means to such an end.” He attributed the defect of the architectural effect of the buildings to the poor conditions of their settings. In their current state, individual government buildings were surrounded by their own landscapes which differed in style and effect. He states that the lack of coordination between the surrounding grounds of the building has produced an effect of disunity. Olmsted asserted, “what is wanting is a federal bond.”

Despite his recommendation to introduce a unified landscape into the plan of the city to produce a “fine impression of unity,” Congress restricted his work to the Capitol grounds. His criticism of the current state of the Capitol grounds was based on the fact that “too much importance seems to be generally given to the circumstance that the first Capitol building was designed.” Olmsted’s observation referred to the fact that the eastern front was the principal entrance, as the Capitol was built on the supposition that the city would expand in that direction. L’Enfant’s original plan placed the Capitol square on the west of the building, which suggested that he intended the western front to serve as the principal entrance. However, in Andrew Ellicott’s revised plan, he located the Capitol further west on the edge of the slope, so that the entrance courtyard had to be located on the east. (See Fig. 11) The early architect, William Thornton’s design for the building reflected this assumption as the principal carriage entrance was placed on the east face of the building. Olmsted asserted that a building could have two fronts as “most noble buildings in fact are designed with two, of which not infrequently that of the carriage or most used entrance is the less important architecturally and in the landscape” as was the case at the Capitol. Olmsted considered the absence of a principal entrance on the west front,
which faced the city, as favorable for viewing the beauty of both the architecture and surrounding grounds. Thus, Olmsted contested the necessity of a central western approach, which had been a consistent feature in the plan of the grounds since 1803. (See Fig. 17)

Olmsted did find fault with the current treatment of the western grounds, however he believed that the arrangement would be no different “had the most firmly established principles and the most satisfactory precedents in Landscape Architect had been consulted.” Rather, Olmsted solely blamed the “poor use that has been made of the opportunity thus originally secured.”

Olmsted must have again been referring to the incorrect placement of the building that disregarded L’Enfant’s original siting. The building as it stands, sits further west on the brow of the hill than it was intended to. This error affected both the architecture and the grounds. The western façade appeared irregular because the slope required an additional subbasement story that was inconsistent with the rest of the building. It also caused the building to have a “low appearance” when viewed from a distance. This presentation of the building was the result of the poor placement of trees, but also the building’s siting on the edge of the hill made it appear without a solid foundation. The sudden slope also presented difficulties planting and providing an adequate western approach.

Olmsted also criticized the current arrangement of the grounds, particularly the placement of the trees, for its inadequate views of the building. He blamed the composition of the trees which blocked the viewer from “fully enjoying the architectural design” as there was no position from the east or west where one could
“hold it all in a fair perspective.” The dense mass of trees on the western portion of the grounds had long blocked views of the western elevation of the building. When the building was smaller, the trees completely obscured the building from some perspectives. A photograph from 1848 of the western elevation reveals the degree to which the building was hidden. (Fig. 48) In a photograph taken in the 1863, it is apparent that from a further viewpoint, the trees are so dense that the lower half of the building is completely obscured. (Fig. 49) The image also shows the state of the adjoining Mall, which appears under construction. In a closer view of the dome, the trees closest to the building completely conceal the entire elevation of the building. (Fig. 50)

Olmsted attributed the best views of the full building to viewpoints from the southwest and northwest, but noted that even from these angles the building appears “crowding over the edge of the hill” without proper support. Although both Charles Bulfinch and Thomas U. Walter attempted to furnish the building with supportive terraces, Olmsted criticized the grass and stone flagged terraces for their inability to sustain the forms and proportions of the building. He blamed these disadvantages on the fact that the base lines of the wings “were not adapted to the ground they stand upon” but were laid down in relation to the original building.

**Planting**

Olmsted began work at the site by laying down a new layer of suitable soil, grading and filling the grounds and installing new sewerage, gas, and water mains. To make soil, Olmsted proposed to “deep plough, manure, harrow and till” and added
whatever good soil he could obtain from vacant lots and old gardens. Due to the poor quality of the existing soil and careless planting, Olmsted reported that at least four hundred trees would have to be removed, and the entire grounds re-graded. In order for the building to be seen properly, trees would have to be removed and land re-graded. A portion of the eastern grounds that sloped eight feet from the Capitol to the eastern boundary was excavated in order to conform to the level of the adjacent streets. This was “difficult work,” Olmsted confided to a friend, “in which I am likely for ten years to come to get more kicks than halfpence.” Yet Olmsted did not abandon the project at the Capitol, for he recognized that “the matter is one of for many reasons of much national importance… but I should hardly like the Ways and Means to know that I meant to have $60,000 spent for the improvement of the soil, but I don’t see how a tolerable condition can be hoped for at much less cost than that, do you?”

Because he was overseeing other projects at the same time, Olmsted worked part-time in Washington, and organized an on-site team to execute the daily work, led by engineer John A. Partridge who from 1874 supervised the surveying and installation of drainage systems. Two years later, F. H Cobb succeeded him and held the position until the work was completed in 1889. Olmsted also hired George Radford, a former partner of Calvert Vaux, as construction supervisor. For architectural assistance, Olmsted enlisted Thomas Wisedell, who had been an assistant to Vaux and had worked with Olmsted on previous commissions. Wisdell designed the architectural elements, which included the terraces, ventilation towers, lighting fixtures, and fountains. After Wisdell’s death in 1884, C.H. Walker
completed Wisdell’s architectural designs. Oliver Bullard and Cobb supervised the purchase and installation of planting materials. Since Olmsted spent little time in Washington, one would expect the design team to be relatively independent, but historian Elizabeth Meyer notes that correspondence indicates that the team hesitated to act without Olmsted’s written approval for fear of jeopardizing the overall scheme.

Olmsted addressed the Capitol’s poor visibility by carefully positioning trees and plants to create desirable vistas and prospects. To achieve these favorable views of the building, “it was necessary that the plantations should be so disposed as to leave numerous clear spaces between the central and outer parts of the ground.”

Olmsted divided the greenery into three categories of planted areas: the periphery plantings, the open interior lawns, and the terrace foundation plantings. Olmsted located most of the plantings along the lobed-shaped plots formed by the curvilinear approaches. (See Fig. 45) In this aerial view of the Capitol site from 1919, the contrast between the open lawns and umbrageous pathways is very apparent. However, there is artistry in their contrast which gives the harmony. The curving lines of the lawns and tree covered paths contrasts the formal architecture of the building. (Fig. 51) The image shows how the trees are deliberately placed within the grounds. The plantings were meant to support the buildings prominence rather than detracting from it. He placed thick under-bushes and larger, denser trees along the periphery of the grounds to prevent them from blocking views of the building. They were also meant to “partially shut out from view the immediate surroundings of nondescript buildings and to provide an appropriate background supporting and
presenting to advantage a great monument.” The open interior lawns were arranged “in order that the Capitol, in its more admirable aspects, might be happily presented to view; [thus] it was necessary that the plantations should be disposed as to leave numerous clear spaces between the central and outer parts of the grounds.”

Olmsted arranged the plantings as successions of distinct spaces, recalling the idea behind Benjamin Henry Latrobe’s 1815 site plan. Latrobe’s plan divided the grounds into formal sections of space. However, within the distinct spaces, he implements both formal and informal planting of trees. He treated the grounds closest to the Capitol building in a formal, partitioned manner. His plan also included a landscape scheme for the adjacent Mall. The treatment of these public grounds appears increasingly informal and pastoral, compared to the delineative nature of the Capitol grounds. In Olmsted’s arrangement of the grounds, he implements two contrasting zones of scenery, one “pastoral and spacious”, which were the elliptical lawns and the other “intimate and lush,” which were the umbrageous walkways. He constructed the space as to guide the viewer to see and experience the space as harmony through contrast. In this 1934 photograph taken from a walkway on the southeast side of the building, one gets the sense of the contrast between the intimate, shaded nature of the pedestrian walkways and the open space between the viewer and the building. (Fig. 52)

Olmsted deliberately controlled the placement, size, and texture of the plantings to manipulate perspective and to create carefully selected vistas. He called for a variety of species of undergrowth to create moderate contrasts of form and color. When choosing the types of plants, he considered the climate of Washington in
order to ensure the healthy growth and greenness. The trees were planted in such a way to encourage them to grow together in groups “in which their individual qualities would gradually emerge harmoniously,” emphasizing group composition over the individual qualities. To create views from the Capitol, he kept shrubbery below the plane of sight from the building. The lower plantings were for the purpose of “connecting and merging the higher foliage with the verdure of the lawns” in order to emphasize the “apparent perspective distance.” In this photograph of a view of the north wing from the west, the shrubs and plantings on the terrace provide a gradual transition between the lawn and the building. (Fig. 53) While the marble of the terrace is most prominent at the central section of the building, it is notable that the greenery on areas of the north wing of the terrace form a solid verdure embankment, recalling Bulfinch’s earlier earth glacis.

Olmsted also considered the placement of the trees’ emotional effect on the visitors. In an essay written in 1886 called “A Healthy Change in the Tone of the Human Heart,” Olmsted wrote that people are “less agreeably moved by trees when standing out with marked singularity of form or color than when the distinctive qualities of one are partly merged by those of others, in groups and masses, as in natural wood sides.” Olmsted’s attention to the details of each element of his landscape was for both the presentation of the building and the benefit of the people who experienced it. Although Olmsted subordinated the individual qualities of the trees so not to distract from the greater composition, he placed individual identification labels on the trees. The labels were in response to the visitor’s interest in the plantings at the Capitol, which Olmsted saw as “gratifying evidence of the
growing preparation of the public mind to give economic forestry its due national
importance, and also of a rising disposition to study the choice of trees and methods
of using them as aids to public health and comfort, and as means for the decoration of
homes and the improvement of scenery.”

In addition to the controlled effect of the plantings on the building’s visibility,
Olmsted carefully manipulated the different views of the building. He stated that the
Openings are maintained, through which direct front views of the central
portico and the dome will be had from the outer parts of the ground, upon
opposite sides, and diagonal perspective views of the center facades from four
directions. In six other directions from the center of the structure only low-headed trees are planted, so that in each case the Capitol may be seen rising
above banks of foliage from points several miles distant.

In this photograph, it is evident how Olmsted deliberately placed trees along the
walkways to create optimal frames for the various views of the building. (Fig. 54)
The trees vary in size and shape, which enhance the visual context in which the
building is viewed.

The vistas and prospects were as integral to Olmsted’s design as the planting
and circulation. The principal prospects extended west from the terrace over the
central lawn towards the Washington Monument, and across the valley of the
Potomac. This vista had been originally established by L’Enfant in his selection of the
site. Olmsted reintroduced the diagonal vistas, which L’Enfant had originally
established in his placement of the public buildings. The vistas were geometrically
determined, “originating at the corners of First and C streets, their intersection marks
the center point of the Capitol grounds.” These view of the Capitol from the southwest and northwest attests to the strength of the impressions of the building from the diagonal viewpoint. (Fig. 55 and 56) From this diagonal, all sections of the building are visible and the terrace with its surrounding close plantings integrate the building into the slope of the hill.

Olmsted emphasized these diagonals, which were so integral to L’Enfant’s vision, in his physical design. The four lobed shape plots are angled diagonally and radiate from the Capitol building. Olmsted’s elimination of the central western approach also gives primacy to the two angled approaches as extensions of Pennsylvania and Maryland avenues. By carefully controlling the optimal views of the building, Olmsted manipulated the viewer to perceive the Capitol in its fullest grandeur.

**Circulation**

Olmsted’s system of circulation at the Capitol grounds was as complex as his conception of the placement of greenery. The issue of circulating and approaching the Capitol building had been a persisting problem at the grounds. Twenty-one streets and forty-six carriage and pedestrian entrances touched the Capitol grounds. The approach from the west had been particularly problematic as the steep slope made it difficult to provide a visually and physically easy transition. His solution for the placement of these paths reflected his conception that the grounds’ needed systematic regulation. Throughout his design, Olmsted imposed symmetrical order without
geometric formality. (See Fig. 48) This was a departure from the earlier treatment of the grounds, which were regulated almost entirely by formal, geometric lines. (See Fig 17 and 24) In all of the earlier plans, an exception to the geometric formality was the semicircular curving drive along the western boundary. Olmsted remained faithful to this aspect of the design by keeping the curvilinear western boundary and emphasizing it with the addition of small circular drives at the intersection of the western boundary and Pennsylvania and Maryland avenues.

Olmsted’s early “skeleton plan” from 1874 conceived of the western grounds as a more formal and rectilinear composition than the final version of the plan. (Fig. 57) In the skeleton plan, Olmsted did not implement the curvilinear paths for both the east and the west grounds as he does in his final plan. Instead, the earlier plan depicts linear pathways that cross and connect at sharp angles to form the main northern, southern and western approaches. These three pathways are the only linear aspects of the plan, as the remainder of the circulation system is consistent with the final plan.

Olmsted recognized that a more overtly formal scheme would not have satisfied the nineteenth century public. In his 1882 report, Olmsted states that

Some may ask whether, under the circumstances, a strictly architectural design would not have had advantages. It is enough to say that that, for several reasons, no such plan, if understood, would have been acceptable to Congress or the public taste of the period. It would therefore, have soon been ruined in the treatment of details. Public taste strangely admits the topiary work to be mixed up with natural forms of vegetation, and applauds a profusion of artificial features in what passes for natural gardening. Nevertheless, it
condemns, even in situations where they would be most pardonable, the grander and mare essential aims of ancient gardening.\textsuperscript{285}

In addition to the public opinion, Olmsted considered the site’s topographical context with its steep slope when reconsidering the western approaches. The slope required a circulation system that conformed to the topography, rather than to a strict, geometric scheme.

Olmsted’s system of circulation illustrates the degree to which curving forms could successfully impose imposed geometric order. (See Fig. 51) The densely yet selectively planted trees adorn the walkways, but in a way that sharply contrasts the allees from the 1850’s. (See Fig. 33) Olmsted integrated the twenty-one streets, leading from all sides towards the Capitol, in a harmonious yet effective way. The approaches are designed “to be reduced by converging junctions to seven, three, to enter the court at each end and one opposite the main portico.”\textsuperscript{286} The approaches are laid out so as to create two unbroken plats of ground, “elliptical in form, each five hundred feet in breadth.” Just as the earlier plans had used pathways to delineate the distinct forms of the grounds, Olmsted’s paths defined the space but with curvilinear lines instead of linear ones. Olmsted’s informal, curvilinear pathways balanced the linear forms of the building’s architecture. Through contrast, Olmsted imposed harmony between the forms of the grounds and the building.

Olmsted’s circulation plan at the Capitol grounds also reflected a program intended to control the movement of visitors. He considered the functions of the grounds, which brought great processions, ceremonious assemblies and the attendance of “vast bodies of people, without order or discipline” who “surge through
in a manner that overrules all ordinary guardianship.” Further, the grounds also served as a “common to be crossed or occupied in any part as suited individual convenience.” The formal arrangement of the system of circulation at the grounds effectively directed the visitors towards the principal entrances of the building and allowed movement in all directions across the grounds. The majority of Olmsted’s pathways converge into the formal entrance court on the eastern side of the building. Although the pathways are curvilinear, their formal arrangement dictates a clear system of movement throughout the grounds.

Terraces

In addition to his landscape scheme for the grounds, Olmsted also proposed the addition of a marble terrace for the western front of the building. Although Congress had not initially requested the terrace, it would become an integral part of Olmsted’s overall improvement to the site. It is evident that Olmsted’s original conception of the necessary improvements to the site included a terrace. When Olmsted first conferred with architect Edward Clark, he immediately suggested the introduction of a structure at the base of the building designed to remedy the “unfavorable circumstances under which it had to be observed.”

With his arrangement of the western approaches and his monumental terrace for the west front, Olmsted’s treatment of the western grounds restored L’Enfant’s original intentions for the Capitol by reorienting the Capitol to face the city. L’Enfant had originally oriented the building facing west, with the Capitol facing the White House and the Mall. However, the Capitol was subsequently built facing east on the
supposition that the city would develop in that direction. By the 1870’s, all of the
major public buildings such as the Treasury and Commerce building had been built to
the west of the Capitol. Thus the terrace and grand western approaches reunited the
Capitol with the other monumental features of the city’s layout. Olmsted argued that
“the larger part of the city… will no longer appear to tail off to the rear of the Capitol,
but what ahs been considered its rear will be recognized as its more dignified and
stately front.”

Olmsted transformation of the west front gave the Capitol two fronts as he
had asserted earlier that most noble buildings are designed with two. With the
principal entrance located on the east of the building, the west front was left entirely
free from the disturbance of carriages. “It is on that front that any beauty of
architecture possessed by the building will commonly be seen to the highest
advantage and on which any landscape beauty associated with it may be best enjoyed
from within.” He improved the eastern front by transforming into a monumental
courtyard.

The terrace was an unprecedented feature. Charles McLaughlin notes that in
1892, “no one in the United States had built such a large and formal structure
intended almost entirely for aesthetic effect.” The only comparable structure that
existed was in New York’s Central Park, where in 1864, Olmsted’s partner Calvert
Vaux had constructed Bethesda Terrace. Olmsted would have been very familiar with
the terrace. While the Bethesda terrace was not as large as the one Olmsted proposed
for the Capitol, it shared a similar design with its arcade, two stairways, and retaining
walls stretching on either side of the stairways.
Historically, the west front of the Capitol had always presented a difficult aesthetic problem. Even the early architects of the Capitol, Benjamin Latrobe and Charles Bulfinch, who first addressed the aesthetic issue in the early 1800’s, were unable to provide an adequate resolution. In 1810, Latrobe proposed a structure resembling the Propylaea that formed the approach to the Greek Parthenon to be placed below the west front of the Capitol. The Propylaea structure intended to provide a grand entrance from the west and to ease the visual transition between the steep slope of the grounds and the building. (See Fig. 20 and 21) However, the plan for the structure was never executed as Latrobe was replaced by Bulfinch before the west front was realized.

In 1822, Charles Bulfinch designed the present west front of the Capitol. In 1826, he created a terrace of “heaped earth” in an effort to mask the subbasement level. Several features of Bulfinch’s plan anticipated Olmsted’s much larger terrace. Like Olmsted’s terrace, Bulfinch’s had two staircases at the center separated from each other by an arcade and an open courtyard. In 1864, Thomas U. Walter proposed to amend Bulfinch’s terrace to conform to the size of the extended building. However, he did not propose any changes to the Bulfinch scheme, but rather extended the grass-covered earth terrace to the north and south around the additional wings.

In a memorandum submitted to the Secretary of the Interior and presented to Congress on October 31, 1874, Olmsted introduced a proposal for a terrace that would replace the existing earth embankment. The terrace would be fifty feet wide with ten feet high supporting walls “of the same material and architectural character as the main structure… which will apparently give greater proportionate height and
breath of the base to the building... and will also impart of it the appearance of being seated more firmly on the summit of the hill.”

The terrace would embrace the north, south and west faces of the building. The terrace would also feature a double stairway, reminiscent of Bulfinch’s existing stairway but on a much grander scale. From the early date of the memorandum, it is apparent that Olmsted conceived the idea of the terrace in conjunction with this larger improvement scheme for the grounds.

Olmsted criticized Bulfinch’s terrace for being inadequate and out of harmony with the present size of the Capitol. Although Bulfinch’s terrace intended to enhance the presentation of the building, Olmsted though that it actually called more attention to its faults. He stated that the “scant embankments faced with turf, by which its deep basement and foundations are concealed, have the effect of enhancing, rather than overcoming, this defect of position.” Olmsted also observed that the existing terrace was too narrow to support the “magnificent structure above it; that it has too much the appearance of a cheap fortification, and that the base is too thin for the large building to stand upon.”

Olmsted’s terrace would provide a grander base for the building as it would extend the width of the existing terrace by twenty feet. The replacement of the grass terrace, which suggested impermanence, with a marble terrace with its implications of stability and grandeur, would affirm the dignity of the building and bring the terrace in harmony with the appearance of the building. The effect of the terrace and stairway would give the building additional height and provided a more dignified front to the public face of the building. Olmsted argued that the terrace would give the
building a firmer base in which the building would “gain greatly in the supreme qualities of stability, endurance, and repose.” He also believed that the terrace would balance the height of the building, so that the Capitol would no longer be overpowered by the large dome. The terrace would also produce a formal visual transition between the building and the adjoining grounds. From the terrace, the prospects that L’Enfant had intended would also be restored. The terrace would enhance the formal and visual connection between the reciprocal monuments such as the Washington Monument.

Olmsted also denounced the existing system of approaches to the building, particularly the western approaches. He said that “attention should be called to the great defects on the present arrangement of entering the Capitol from the west. The present stairway was designed with reference to the original small central building, and was architecturally inadequate for even that.” The stairway was the only entrance from the west, which Olmsted regarded as “awkward and mean in appearance, but exceedingly inconvenient, and rapidly approaching a dangerous condition.” In an architectural model of the Capitol as completed by Bulfinch, the two stairways on either sides of the terrace appear modest compared to the size of the building. Olmsted believed that his plan to remove the central western approach and introduce more monumental approaches from Pennsylvania and Maryland avenues would make the present terrace’s “defects more conspicuous.” In re-establishing the two western approaches that extend from Pennsylvania and Maryland avenues, Olmsted also reaffirmed L’Enfant’s intentions of connecting the site with the principal avenues to the rest of the city.
Although the terrace and stairway would successfully restore the height and provide a fitting pedestal for the building, Congress did not immediately approve of the idea for it would require a substantial expenditure that had not been anticipated. However, there were several qualified critics who supported the necessity of the terrace. Former architect of the Capitol, Thomas U. Walter declared that the terrace “would be the making of the building.” The current architect of the Capitol, Edward Clark, had been a staunch supporter since Olmsted had first suggested the structure in 1874. In his annual report of 1874, he urged Congress to make the necessary appropriations “to improve the grounds in a manner worthy of the building which they surround.” He believed that the Bulfinch’s “rustic terraces” had a “plain and unfinished appearance” that showed the necessity of the “proposed terrace-wall in order to connect the grounds with the building in a harmonious manner.”

Senator Justin Morrill, who had supported Olmsted from the beginning of the project, continued to be the lead advocate for the terrace. Senator Morrill’s persistent support and stealthy maneuvering would eventually secure the appropriations for the terrace nearly ten years after he first proposed it. When Morrill first proposed three hundred thousand dollars for the terrace in 1875, he was confident that there would be no objection. He claimed that it had been recommended unanimously by the joint Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds, and that he had “never yet seen a republican or democrat of either House that did not approve of the plan. I have never seen an architect that did not approve of the plan.” He argued that the terrace would also “answer for the storage of half a million documents, which room is very urgently needed by both Congress and by the Departments.” The issue of storage for the
Library of Congress, which was then located in the west central part of the Capitol building, would greatly complicate the debate over the terrace. Even after the initial enlargement of the Library of Congress, the library continued to suffer from spaces shortages. Although there was no doubt that the library needed additional space, opinions differed as to the method of providing it. Some supported an addition built on the west front, while others preferred relocating the Library from the Capitol altogether.

Other senators agreed to the necessity of Olmsted’s terraces. Republican Senator Angus Cameron of Wisconsin and member of the Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds asserted that the question of the terrace should not be considered in regard to its use as a storage space for documents. He stated that “this Capitol cannot be perfect” as both Clark and Olmsted had suggested, without the expenditure. He added that “I am sure every Senator feels an interest in the beauty, the strength and the perpetuity… of this Capitol, for I trust it will live as long as time shall last.” However, there were other senators who were strongly against the expenditure. Democrat Senator Daniel Voorhees of Indiana denounced appropriations on the grounds based on his assessment of the aesthetics and cost of Olmsted’s improvements. He stated that “on behalf of the people of this county, I hope that Congress will let things alone a little. This is not the time to be keeping up a system of what we call improvements, which is really a system of defacement to the grounds.” However, Senator Voorhees admitted that he has taken no part in this debate, but has “watched it closely, content in my own mind to oppose as I shall all expenditures of the public money on such a reckless scale and for such purposes as
these.” Another Democrat Senator James Beck of Kentucky shared similar views as Senator Voorhees, arguing that there is no “public necessity” that requires tearing up the western grounds.306

In addition to contentions between parties within the Senate, there was a larger rupture between the Senate and the House of Representatives over the issues of the terrace and further improvements to the grounds. While the “economical” House proposed to appropriate one hundred thousand dollars for continuing work on the western grounds, the Senate wished to expend one hundred and fifty thousand.307 This rift between the House and the Senate was hardly new concerning the improvement of the grounds. Throughout the course of the debate over the Capitol grounds, the House continuously thwarted legislation to appropriate necessary funds.

In an effort to gain support for the terraces, Thomas Wisedell drew two views of the Capitol’s west front in an effort to promote the idea of the terrace. Both renderings depicted an addition the central building fronted by a portico to accommodate the library. One view showed Bulfinch’s old terrace “scooped away in the center of the Capitol to make way for the new extension,” which intentionally produced a ridiculous effect. The other view depicted the stone terrace firmly supporting the library extension. Although no decision had been made regarding the library extension, “Olmsted cleverly used it to help justify the marble terrace.”308

Much to Olmsted’s disappointment, Senator Justin Morrill failed to secure the appropriation of two hundred thousand dollars for the improvement of the grounds and erection of the terrace. The debate over the providing the appropriation for the terrace continued for the next couple of years with Senator Morrill as one of its
leading supporters. The bill failed again in 1876, 1877 and 1878. Despite the fact that Morrill was no longer the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Public buildings, he continued to be the leading advocate in support of improvements to the grounds and the creation of the terrace.

In 1886, Congress finally authorized the construction of a separate building for the Library of Congress. With the library out of the picture, Morrill used the opportunity to direct the Senate’s attention back to the terrace project. In an appropriation approved on August 7, 1883, Morrill secured ten thousand dollars to construct the permanent approach to the terrace on its northeast corner. Morrill was able to bypass any objection to the bill because he never used the word “terrace,” but rather spoke of “the approach.” He proposed to amend the civic bill for 1881. When the approach was constructed with the small sum, it ensured that the terrace would have to be built. On February 6, 1884, Morrill’s Committee on Public buildings and grounds proposed a bill that would provide the terrace with the necessary funds for its completion.

Regional interests may have informed Morrill’s firm support of the terrace project. Morrill promoted the marble terrace as a more dignified and imposing base than the existing grass and dirt terraces. Morrill’s support of the marble terrace may have been motivated by his desire to secure employment and promote his native Vermont’s economy. Coincidentally, in 1887 the contract for the construction of the terraces and stairway went to the Vermont Marble Company.

With the construction of the terrace assured, Olmsted resigned from his duties in December 1884. Because the terrace was primarily a work of architecture, he
believed that Clark’s office should supervise the project. However, a potential encroachment of the aesthetic integrity of the terrace design brought Olmsted back to Washington D.C in 1885. Olmsted had argued for his terrace to be a “windowless base” in order for it to give the effect of a solid foundation for the building. The ninety-three rooms proposed for inside the structure would be lighted with skylights and windows facing into the courtyard. The legislators did not understand Olmsted’s aesthetic objective and rather wished for the rooms to have windows on the outside wall for “ventilation and a spectacular view of the Mall.”  

Republican Senator Eugene Hale of Maine claimed that after looking at engravings and pictures of “stately buildings, remarkable buildings, buildings the structures of which have given renown to the architects, and I cannot find anywhere any building with a great base unrelieved by doors or windows, but precisely in form like the base of a monument.”

Ironically, this had been precisely Olmsted’s intention. In transforming the slope of the hill into an impenetrable, marble base with the Capitol building seated on a firm foundation, Olmsted restored L’Enfant’s vision of the Jenkins hill as a “pedestal awaiting a monument.”
Conclusion--

While the landscaping of the Capitol grounds was completed in 1882, it wasn’t until that year that Olmsted’s plans for the terrace were approved. Construction of the terrace would continue until 1892. As a result, because the two projects were realized in succession, Olmsted’s did not become clearly apparent until at least the early 1890s.\footnote{314}

Initially Olmsted’s contemporaries were not enthusiastic. Many Washingtonians lamented the loss of what had been a popular gathering place for all classes of society. We see this in an 1870 Harper’s Weekly wood engraving titled a “Music Evening at the Capitol Grounds.” According to the accompanying article, “every pleasant Wednesday evening all Washington crowds to the beautiful grounds at the east front of the National Capitol, to listen to the splendid music furnished by the Marine band.” The most attractive feature of the site was “the delight which it affords the children of the city, who on these occasions are allowed freedom of the grounds.”\footnote{315}

Others protested the necessary adjustments to the terrain and the removal of old or diseased trees. As early as 1874, the (Washington) Evening Post complained that, “not an inch of old earth is left, nor a blade of grass undisturbed on the whole fifteen acres!”\footnote{316} In 1878, the New York Times called the landscaping project, “vandalism of improvement” and compared the felling of trees to the loss of history as the “old trees in whose rustling leaves we seemed to hear legends of the youth of the Republic—whose trunks were the archives of history.”\footnote{317} This concern echoed
that expressed by some politicians during the congressional debates about
appropriation for Olmsted’s project.

And some observers criticized Olmsted’s design decisions. The Washington
Tribune opined the designer had destroyed “that grassy park, so delightful for its
shade in summer” by subdividing it with “broad, crooked carriageways and curving
walks, leaving long, narrow and ill-shape strips of grounds, not one of them with
glass surface large enough to play a game of croquet on.” This writer also attacked
the substantial appropriations granted to the project, guessing that it would cost “at
least a million dollars” before the work east and west of the Capitol was finished. He
also predicted that the design was destined to fail because “before many years all this
meaningless, very expensive, and yet very unsubstantial stone work and crooked
carriageways will be wiped out, and this one breezy park restored to its grassy surface
and shade trees.”

Olmsted was quick to defend his design. As we have seen, his 1882 report to
the Architect of the Capitol constituted a very thorough description and explanation
of his creative philosophy and intentions. In particular, Olmsted emphasized how he
had to reconcile congress’s desire for “any suitable sylvan and verdant effect” with
his own design theory of formality for settings of public buildings. He revealed his
true attitude to public opinion in a footnote in the report:

It is enough to say that that, for several reasons, no such plan, if understood,
would have been acceptable to Congress or the public taste of the period. It
would therefore, have soon been ruined in the treatment of details. Public taste
strangely admits the topiary work to be mixed up with natural forms of vegetation, and applauds a profusion of artificial features in what passes for natural gardening. Nevertheless, it condemns, even in situations where they would be most pardonable, the grander and mare essential aims of ancient gardening.\textsuperscript{319}

Olmsted was not insensitive to good publicity however and he made sure that the content of his report was made available to the general public by agreeing to an interview with the (Washington) \textit{Evening Star} soon after he submitted his report.

It is difficult to document public opinion of Olmsted’s transformation of the Capitol—the grounds and the terraces—after 1892 because the government instituted new rules about how these spaces were administered and how they could be used. In 1896, Congress passed a law regulating the use of all public parks and “improved reservations” in the District of Columbia because they were “for the purpose of adorning the District.” Specific restrictions were imposed on use of the Capitol grounds because they “have been formed to subserve the quiet and dignity of the Capitol, and prevent the occurrences near it of such disturbances as are incident to the ordinary use of public streets and place.” Informal gatherings, whether musical concerts or political protests, were henceforth prohibited. Instead restrictions now were imposed that limited public access to the roads, walks and places “prepared for the purpose by flagging, paving or otherwise,” and stepping, climbing, removing or “any way injuring any statue, seat, wall or any tree, plant, shrub or turf.”\textsuperscript{320}
Not until after Olmsted’s death in 1903 did his design for the Capitol grounds receive substantial praise. In a 1906 article in *Home and Garden*, John Nolen characterized Olmsted’s work at the Capitol as a major contribution to the art of landscape architecture. Because the grounds have such national significance, Nolen observed, “it is natural to expect that pride will be taken in their appearance.” He echoed Olmsted’s 1882 report footnote when he attributed initial negative reactions to the Capitol grounds design to the fact that “public opinion thirty years ago was in no sense favorable to formal gardening… the truth is there was less general familiarity with the aims of the design out of doors than there is today.”

Olmsted’s design for the Capitol grounds formed a link between two eras in Washington’s history. On the one hand, the designer respected the desire of Congress to integrate the grounds more clearly with the newly-completed Capitol building. On the other hand, Olmsted’s efforts to move beyond this so as to integrate the grounds more fully with the surrounding city, were frustrated by the ad hoc procedures embraced by the government at that time. Nolen’s appreciation reveals that both attitudes and approaches in Washington were changing as regards “design out of doors.” By this date, the federal government was engaged in reassessing public space and spatial design in Washington with a view to making improvements throughout the city’s urban landscape. In 1902, Senator James McMillan (R-Michigan), who had stepped into the role played earlier by Justin Morrill, was appointed chair of a commission that would oversee the creation of a comprehensive plan for the city. McMillan and his colleagues recognized that the piecemeal approach to civic improvements that had characterized the nineteenth century development of
Washington detracted from the symbolic power of the city while it also undermined the delivery of effective public services. The architects, landscape architects and city planners who came together to draft what became known as The McMillan Plan, would transform the Washington landscape so as to achieve the fully integrated system of public architecture and public spaces first envisioned by Pierre L’Enfant.  

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http://mediadb.wesleyan.edu/v1_mdu.media?v_media_collection_seq=86855
Figure 3. “George Town and Federal City, or City of Washington.” T. Cartwright, 1801.
Aquatint. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division,
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002695146/.
Figure 11. “Comparison of Detail of Capitol Site, Ellicott and Detail of Capitol Site, L’Enfant.” Reps, *Washington on View* and Miller, *Washington in Maps*. 
Figure 19. “Plan of the Mall and the Capitol Grounds,” Benjamin Henry Latrobe, 1815, Water color on paper, Geography and Map Division Library of Congress.
Figure 21. “United States Capitol, Washington, D.C. South Elevation with Propylaea.”
Figure 23. “United States Capitol Grounds, Washington, D.C. Site Plan, Botanic Garden, City Canal.” Charles Bulfinch, ca. 1824-1829. Ink, watercolor, and wash on paper. 
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. 
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002712003/.
Figure 28. “Plat from 1830 with Extended Western Boundary in 1836.”
Figure 36. “Plan Submitted for the Alteration of the Streets and Avenues Around the Capitol Consequent Upon its Extension.” Benjamin B. French, 1854.
Figure 44. “Plat of 1857 with Boundary Extensions from 1872.”
Figure 48. “East Front of the Capitol.” 1848. Copyprint Architect of the Capitol. Photograph. 
Figure 51. “View of U.S. Capitol From Air.” Harris and Ewing, 1919. *Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.*
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/hec2008008792/
Figure 56. “View from the Northwest of the U.S Capitol.” Albert S. Burns, 1934-35. *Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.*
Figure 58. “View West from Western Terrace toward Washington Monument.”

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division
NOTES


3. The “Capitol” refers to the building itself, while the “Capitol site” implies both the building and its surrounding grounds.


10. Farrar, 40.


18. Gutheim, 52.

19. Gutheim, 49.


28. Gutheim, 78.

29. Gutheim, 84.


32. Shortly after the U.S Capitol grounds project, Olmsted was commissioned to landscape the grounds of two state capitols, Albany in 1875 and Hartford in 1878.


35.


CHAPTER 1


50. Berg, 12.


57. Dougherty, 13.


62. Bednar, 76.


69. Jennings Jr., 267.
70. “Letter in 1803 from an unidentified English visitor” in John William Reps, 
*Washington on View: The Nation's Capital since 1790* (Chapel Hill: University of 


72. Allen, 18

and the Cultural Life of Early Washington, D.C., 1794-1828.* (Athens: Published 
for the U.S. Capitol Historical Society by Ohio UP, 2009)

74. Thornton to Lettsom, Feb 15, 1787, William Thornton, Charles M. Harris, Daniel 
Preston, *Papers of William Thornton: 1781-1802,* (University Press of Virginia: 
1995) 45.

182.


77. Allen, 47.

78. “Message from the President, Senate proceedings of Jan. 11, 1802,” in 
*Documentary History*, 100.


82. Henry Knight, *Letters*, 37, in Reps, 42.


88. “An act making an appropriation for enclosing and improving the public square near the capitol; and to abolish the office of the Commissioners of Public Buildings, and of Superintendent, and for the appointment of one Commissioner of Public Buildings, approved Apr. 29, 1816,” (States at large, V.3, 324).


90. Latrobe to Henry S. B. Latrobe, May 1, 1816, Van Horne, vol. 3, 768–77


93. Latrobe, 16. (Jnls. 2:473)


95. Fazio and Snadon, 497.

96. Fazio and Snadon, 499.


106. Allen, 159.


111. Frances Milton Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (London: 1832), 175.


127. From the “Act making appropriations for the public buildings, and for other purposes,” approved Mar. 2, 1831. (4 Stats at Large, 474) *Documentary History*, 1049.

129. From the “Act making appropriations for civil and diplomatic expenses of Government for year eighteen hundred and forty-nine, and for other purposes,” approved August 12, 1848. (5 Stats at Large, 222) Documentary History, 1052.


133. Robert Mills to the House Committee on Public Buildings, April 8, 1846. Scott, ed, Papers of Robert Mills.


135. Allen, 184.


137. Allen, 185.


140. Allen, 185.

141. Allen, 188.

142. Allen, 193.


146. Allen, 194.

147. Allen, 195.


155. Documentary History, 1053-1069.


158. Ibid, 1057.

159. Ibid, 1057.

160. Ibid, 1058.

161. Ibid, 1059.

162. Ibid, 1064.


164. Ibid, 1058.


168. “From the ’Act making Appropriations for sundry Civil Expenses of the Government for the year ending the thirtieth of June, eighteen hundred and sixty-
one. Approved June 25, 1860. (Stats. at Large, v. 12, 111), in Documentary History, 1069.


172. Examples of this are the 1862 Homestead Act, the Morrill Land Grant College and the Pacific Railroad Act.


179. Ibid, 1079,


181. “An act to provide in Part for Grading the Public Grounds, and for other purposes, approved March 30, 1867.” (Stats. At Large, v. 15, 13), in *Documentary History*, 1082.

182. “Senate proceedings of May 11, 1870.” (Congressional Globe, 41-2, 1205), in *Documentary History*, 1086.

183. Ibid, 1087.


185. Ibid, 1095.


194. Rosenzweig and Blackmar, 100.

195. Rosenzweig and Blackmar, 195.


197. Roper, 148.


199. Frederick Law Olmsted, *Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns: Read before the American Social Science Association at the Lowell Institute, Boston,*


201. Charles E. Beveridge, Paul Rocheleau, and David Larkin, Frederick Law Olmsted: Designing the American Landscape (New York: Rizzoli, 1995)


209. Frederick Law Olmsted to Charles Brace, December, 8, 1860, in Kimball, 64.


212. Roper


221. Roper, 191.


233. Morrill was also a firm proponent of public education and the study of agriculture. As a Republican from a farming background, he advocated for the democratization of the education system and supported the interests of the agricultural working class. He was the author of the “College Land Bill”, and persistently supported it for five years before it passed in 1862 under President Abraham Lincoln. Under the act, each state received 30,000 acres of public land for each its senators and representatives in Congress. The states would then create a perpetual fund to support the endowment, support and maintenance of at least one college in each state. He supported a program of education that emphasized agriculture, engineering and practical courses in order to promote liberal and practical education to the working classes.

234. “Address of Senator William P. Dillingham” in James S. Morrill, and Louise S. Swan, Justin Smith Morrill: Centenary Exercises Celebrated by the State of Vermont, at Montpelier, April Fourteenth, Nineteen Hundred and Ten, in Honor
of the Birth of Justin Smith Morrill, Who Was for Twelve Years a Member of the House of Representatives and for over Thirty Years a United States Senator

(Fulton, N.Y: Morrill, 1910) 34.

235. “Address of Senator William P. Dillingham,” 34.


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243. Justin Morrill to Frederick Law Olmsted, May 19, 1873,

244. “From the annual report of Edward Clark, Architect of the Capitol Extension,
Nov. 1, 1873,” (43-1, House Ex. Doc. No.1 pt. 5 v.1, 768), in Documentary History, 1153.


249. Frederick Law Olmsted to Justin Smith Morrill, January 22, 1874, in Frederick Law Olmsted, Charles E. Beveridge, and Carolyn F. Hoffman, The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: Parks, Politics, and Patronage 1874-1882 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2007), 54

250. Ibid, 54.


265. Ibid, 55.


269. Frederick Law Olmsted to Frederick J. Kingsbury, September 23, 1847, C.C McLaughlin and Charles E. Beveridge, eds., The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted: The Formative Years, 1822-1852 (Baltimore, 1977) 304.


278. “Appendix---Index to Trees About the Capitol, With Advice to Visitors Interested in Them, From the annual report of Edward Clark, Architect of the Capitol,” in Documentary History, 1185.


284. Ibid, 1192.


288. McLaughlin, 240.


290. “Senate proceedings of June 20, 1874,” (Congressional Record, 43-1, 5259), in *Documentary History*, 1157.


300. “Senate proceedings of Mar. 3, 1875,” (Congressional Record, 43-2, 2141), in Documentary History, 1201.

301. “Senate proceedings of June 18, 1878,” (Congressional Record, 45-2, 4800), Doc. History, 1204.

302. Ibid, 1204.


308. “Senate proceedings of July 24, 1886,” (Congressional Record, 49-1, 7441), in *Documentary History*, 1247.

309. Elizabeth Meyer states that it was not until 1895 that Olmsted’s design was fully apparent.

<http://app.harpweek.com/viewarticletext.asp?webhitsfile=hw18700723000040%2Ehtm&xpath=%2FTEI%2E2%E2%5B1%5D%2Ftext%5B1%5D%2Fbody%5B1%5D%2Fdiv1%5B26%5D%26xml=HW%5C1870%5C18700723%2Exml&titleid=HW&volumeid=1870&issueid=0723&pagerange=0473d-


Letter from the Secretary of War, transmitting a copy of a letter from the Chief of Engineers, together with a draft of a proposed act to regulate the use of the public parks and improved reservations in the District of Columbia. December 20, 1895,” (Serial Set H.Doc. 81, Vol. No. 3414, Session Vol. No. 47, 54-1)

