Fort Drive: Reestablishing Its Significance Within Washington, D.C.'s Park System

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This thesis is an in-depth examination of Fort Drive, a 20th century proposed parkway connecting the principal Union Army fortifications which encircled Washington, D.C. The goal of the work is to determine if the landscapes acquired for Fort Drive are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. This paper answers two questions: what role did Fort Drive play in establishing the Nation’s Capital’s park system; and are the remnants of the Fort Drive endeavor significant? These questions were answered through analysis of the National Capital Planning Commission’s records, a comparison of the standards set by current National Register designations, and consideration of the National Park Service’s definition of a cultural landscape. Drawing from over sixty years of primary sources, this thesis showcases Fort Drive as an existing crown feature of Washington, D.C.’s parklands.
Dedication

To my loving parents, Thomas D. Finnigan & Marilyn B. Finnigan—who willingly read drafts, helped through the late nights of research and writing, and provided the opportunity for me to return to school.
Acknowledgements

This thesis would not be complete without acknowledging the many individuals and institutions that provided assistance throughout the process. A special thank you to Dr. Timothy Davis, Susan Horner, Frances McMillen, Dr. Stephen Potter, James Rosenstock, and Gary Scott with the National Park Service—your kindness and guidance during my summer internship kept me passionate about the Civil War Defenses of Washington and led me to want to pursue Fort Drive as my graduate thesis. I would also like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Marcella Brown at the National Capital Planning Commission for allowing me access to the office’s archives and her patience with me, despite my seemingly endless hours occupying her time. Bill Gatlin at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History deserves my thanks as he was kind enough to share his research on National Military Parks and refer sources that proved invaluable to this thesis. The support and advice I received from the entire faculty of the Clemson University/College of Charleston program serves as a true reflection of this special group of professors and I want to thank each and every one of them. I am overwhelmingly grateful to my knowledgeable and encouraging team of thesis readers and advisers, especially Ashley R. Wilson—who provided organization to the earliest scattered drafts and James L. Ward—who’s enthusiasm for my topic and landscape expertise aided the direction of my argument. Lastly, thank you to my friends and classmates who made this experience memorable and Charleston feel like home.
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Introduction

Fort Drive, an overlooked and often dismissed subject in Washington, D.C.’s history contributes significantly to the Capital’s park system—defining the city’s “rim of surrounding hills.”¹ The concept of Fort Drive is a prime example of the City Beautiful effort, but its persistence and versatility in the city’s transportation plans decade after decade represents Fort Drive’s paramount significance as a chief feature of the city. Unfortunately, historians label the project as unrealized, banishing its mention along with other unbuilt proposals in the city’s history. Current failures to examine the project’s contribution to Washington, D.C.’s parklands, neglects the urgency to which these cultural landscapes need to be preserved and protected from imposing urban threats.

At the end of the Civil War, Washington, D.C., had sixty-eight Union fortifications encircling the young Capital. After the conflict was over, the Union fortifications were deconstructed and the land returned or auctioned off to private ownership.² According to the Civil War Defenses of Washington’s Historic Resource Study (2004), it was that action which made it difficult for the Government to reacquire the fortifications for the purpose of public parks in the 20th century.³ At present, eighteen of the Civil War Defenses of Washington are considered National Parks and can be found

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² If the owner, prior the Civil War, had shown sympathy to the Confederate Army, his land was not returned, but auctioned off. Some forts continued to be used for military purposes. One example is Fort Foote, which was used through World War I, and therefore should have a longer ranging period of significance on the National Register nomination form than just 1861–1865.
within George Washington Memorial Park, Rock Creek Park and National Capital Parks-East.⁴

⁴ The Civil War Defenses of Washington include Fort Marcy (VA), Battery Kemble (DC), Fort Bayard (DC), Fort Reno (DC), Fort De Russy (DC), Fort Stevens (DC), Fort Slocum (DC), Fort Totten (DC), Fort Bunker Hill (DC), Fort Mahan (DC), Fort Chaplin (DC), Fort Dupont (DC), Fort Davis (DC), Fort Stanton (DC), Battery Ricketts (DC), Fort Carroll (DC), Fort Greble (DC), and Fort Foote (MD).
Figure 1.1

These eighteen fortifications, with the addition of Fort Lincoln, were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1977. Presently, the National Capital Region of the National Park Service proposes a revision to the 1977 National Register nomination since the nomination excludes the landscape parks which surround the forts. With limited scholarly sources on Fort Drive, this study provides a compiled narrative of the evolution of the project through investigation of the National Capital Planning Commission’s official documents. This thesis will guide the National Capital Region of the National Park Service as they determine if the parklands of Fort Drive should be included in the revised National Register nomination.

The two questions debated are: What contributory role did Fort Drive play in Washington, D.C.’s urban development and do the fort landscapes meet criteria for inclusion onto the National Register because of ties to the Fort Drive project? Uncovering the answers to these questions involved thorough review of Fort Drive through newspaper and magazine articles, travel to the fort sites, analysis of existing National Register nominations, and most importantly, exploration of minutes and annual reports from the National Capital Planning Commission’s headquarters in Washington, D.C. No longer will the simple dismissal of Fort Drive as a costly unfinished project that fell victim to the changing majorities and sympathies of Congress, be accepted. Although a formal continuous parkway does not exist today, a “parkway was not itself a road” — and

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5 The first National Register nomination was approved in 1974, but excluded Fort Marcy and Fort Foote.
paramount elements such as viewsheds and green open space remain. D.C.’s disjointed assemblage of parkland spanning the District which provides commanding views and recreational community parks can be attributed to the applaudable efforts of the Senate Park Commission and the National Capital Planning Commission in favor of Fort Drive.

Throughout its ‘Golden Age’ (1902–1947), Fort Drive was always considered equal to or more important than the preservation of the Civil War forts, as it was a large contributing feature to the overall comprehensive park system. Therefore, Fort Drive’s significance runs deeper than Civil War commemoration—it is an example of 20th century urban reform. Today, the land acquired for Fort Drive provides the Nation’s Capital with a cultural landscape surrounding Civil War relics.

**Organization and the Use of Sources**

In large part the process of writing this thesis involved organizing sixty years of meeting minutes. As many of the documents from early proceedings of the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) are missing or in poor condition in Washington, D.C., this was an urgent task. Multiple reports, of which certain supplementary sources referenced, were missing from NCPC’s headquarters thus adding difficulty to the task of verifying previous written claims. Important documents that are missing include the following: 1927 Annual Report, John Nolen’s September 1936 map (showing status of

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7 Possible objection to this claim could be considered in the case of Fort Stevens. The only Union fort in D.C. to have experienced an altercation with the Confederate army in 1864, and therefore seen as the most important fort site, and the only one restored.
parkway system), John Nolen’s 1940 Fort Drive Pamphlet (distributed to NCPPC in September of 1940), John Nichols’ 1939 comprehensive statement (presented to NCPPC in March of 1939), and the 1953 Comprehensive Plan.²

To effectively present Fort Drive in manageable summaries, the project’s history was divided into seven phases. Each phase associated with a distinct plan found to be in accordance with the trends from the period of time it was written.

- Fort Drive: Phase One was assigned to the Senate Park Commission’s vision for Fort Drive (1902)
- Fort Drive: Phase Two was assigned to Charles W. Eliot II’s “Fort Drive: Plan for a Parkway Connecting the Civil War Forts and Encircling the City of Washington”(1927)
- Fort Drive: Phase Three was assigned to Jay Downer’s standards for Fort Drive (1940)
- Fort Drive: Phase Four was assigned to T.C. Jeffer’s “Plan for Minimum Construction and Minimum Cost” (1947)
- Fort Drive: Phase Five was assigned to the 1950 Thoroughfare Plan
- Fort Drive: Phase Six was assigned to Fred W. Tuemmler’s “Fort Park System, A Re-evaluation Study of Fort Drive, Washington, D.C.” (1965)
- Fort Drive: Phase Seven was assigned to “Fort Circle Parks” (1970s–2000s)

² Historian Pamela Scott sites the 1953 Comprehensive Plan in Worthy of A Nation, suggesting Fort Drive was abandoned in 1953 as a result of new NCPPC leadership.
To aid in the creation of a coherent and insightful portrayal of Fort Drive, secondary sources were also reviewed. Since true consideration of the project has seemingly slipped through historians’ analyses and discussions on Washington, D.C., little scholarly work mentions Fort Drive directly. Therefore, secondary sources highlighting broader themes were sought. The following themes included 20th century Washington, D.C., commemoration, and parkway history. Of the secondary sources reviewed, five mentioned Fort Drive.

Of those five, *Worthy of a Nation* published by the National Capital Planning Commission, serves as one of the strongest sources. Published originally in 1977 and again in 2006, the book dedicates an entire page to the discussion of Fort Drive, entitled, “Fort Drive: An Unfulfilled Passion.”9 *Worthy of a Nation* takes a strong stance on Fort Drive—blaming its failure on insufficient support.10 This simple dismissal of Fort Drive as a mere “unfulfilled passion” is what this paper attempts to reject.


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9 *Worthy of a Nation*, 205
10 “Throughout the early years of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, requests for funds to realize Fort Drive as a ‘single and unified project’ never captured the imagination of Congress… Yet, however reinterpreted, even as a circumferential highway, the Fort Drive failed to win sufficient support to be realized.” *Worthy of the Nation*, 205.
12 *Designing the Nation’s Capital*, 167.
Timothy Davis, Dana G. Dalrymple, Sue Kohler and Kurt G.F. Helfrich. Timothy Davis, employed by the National Park Service, is a leading academic source on cultural landscapes and parkways, and the chapter entitled “Beyond the Mall: The Senate Park Commission’s Plans for Washington’s Park System,” hints that the NPS, with the approaching sesquicentennial of the Civil War, may be “resuming studies that may one day lead to the completion of the long delayed dream of a circumferential greenway.”

*Mr. Lincoln’s Forts* arguably provides the foundation for awareness of the Civil War Defenses of Washington. Used primarily as a guide, this source gives histories, descriptions, locations, maps and photographs of every Union Army fortification in the District. Authors Benjamin Cooling and Walton Owens highlight the connection that existed between the forts during the Civil War, both by proximity and via a constructed military road. Both men are Civil War enthusiasts, who first published *Mr. Lincoln’s Forts* in 1988. Although not always reliable in their analysis of the integrity of each site, the two authors have dedicated their life to these D.C. fortifications and there is no other source similar. Since Fort Drive was never intended to include all the Civil War Defenses of Washington, the focus of this thesis examines the forts which are National Parks.

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13 “The National Park Service, meanwhile, has more quietly undertaken the task of breathing new life into another unfinished aspect of the Senate Park Commission’s vision by resuming studies that may someday lead to the completion of the long-delayed dream of a circumferential greenway linking the remains of the city’s Civil War forts.” *Designing the Nation’s Capital*, 167.


15 This book was used during the summer of 2011 to conduct site visits to the fort parklands.
Interesting to note is Cooling and Owen’s disdain for the National Park Service’s guardianship of the Civil War Defenses of Washington.\textsuperscript{16}

\textit{The Fort Drive: The Influence and Adaptation of a 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Planning Effort in Washington, DC}, is an undergraduate paper from the historic preservation department at George Washington University.\textsuperscript{17} Although written in 1994, author Chris Shaheen is currently a program manager in D.C.’s office of planning. The twenty-page report is a sign that a shared desire to reestablish Fort Drive’s significance in the history of Washington, D.C., exists.

Lastly, of the sources which discuss Fort Drive, the Historic Resource Study of the Civil War Defenses of Washington Part II, published by the National Park Service in 2004 was reviewed.\textsuperscript{18} Summarizing the sixty years of the project in a few paragraphs, the document is rich with primary sources. Although the Historic Resource Study encapsulates thorough documentation, it fails to provide analysis on Fort Drive’s significance.

This highlighted sample of the assembled secondary sources provides unlimited avenues from which arguments could be made or further investigative paths taken;

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{16} “The National Park Service manages the largest number of forts in Washington (as well as Maryland and Virginia). Inadequate budgets, an organizational structure that divides oversight of the forts among three different National Park Service superintendents, competing priorities, and unknowledgeable staff and bureaucratic disinterest have created a distinct decline in stewardship and public safety in the so-called Fort Circle Parks since the original publication of this volume.” Cooling, xii.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{17} Chris Shaheen, “The Fort Drive: The Influence and Adaptation of a 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Planning Effort in Washington, D.C.” (Undergraduate Paper: George Washington University, 1994).
\end{flushleft}

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however, the direction of this thesis was clear: is Fort Drive significant? Although many of the sources reviewed failed to mention Fort Drive, and there was a gap in the analysis of the sources that did, each influenced the chapters that follow and infer the project’s role within the greater picture of Washington, D.C., the trend of commemoration, and parkway/landscape development.
Chapter 2
Memorialization and the Senate Park Commission

The internationally popular 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois, introduced 27.5 million individuals to technological advancements set within Beaux Arts architecture and landscapes. The exposition was a result of joint collaboration among architects, engineers, artists and landscape architects—and inspired a period referred to as the American Renaissance, which coincided with the lingering memory of the Civil War. Timothy B. Smith, author of *Golden Age of Battlefield Preservation*, refers to the era of the 1890s as the Civil War veteran generation. The period not only marked the age of urban beautification, but also the end of Reconstruction. The public’s sentiment was in favor of classical styles to compliment memories of the past. During this epoch many Civil War veterans were serving in the United States Congress, making support for Civil War preservation stronger than it would ever be again within the federal government and causing the City Beautiful movement to become “something of a crusade as the twentieth century opened.”

All across the States, memorials and monuments were erected to honor men and battles. Organizations such as Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, Sons of Confederate Veterans, and the United Daughters’ of the Confederacy formed and

20 Timothy B. Smith, *The Golden Age of Battlefield Preservation: The Decade of the 1890s and the Establishment of America’s First Five Military Parks* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2008), 34; *Designing the Nation’s Capital*, 30.
21 A few examples include the Calhoun monument in Charleston, South Carolina (1896), Appomattox in Alexandria, Virginia (1889), the Union Solder in Pasadena, California (1906).
increased in membership during the 1890s.\textsuperscript{22} It is inconclusive if this surge in commemoration was a direct off-shoot of the Beaux Arts trend, but the monumental style was adopted as the commemorative style for both Union and Confederate efforts. Author James M. McPherson humorously remarks that “if the Confederacy had raised proportionately as many soldiers as the postwar South raised monuments, the Confederates might have won the war.”\textsuperscript{23} A count of the number of Confederate versus Union monuments raised during the decade of the 1890s is unknown, but acknowledgement of the trend accurately underscores a national desire to idolize the men, stories, and surviving landscapes on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line.

The battlefields that were preserved in the 1890s were “developed, built, and maintained by veterans.”\textsuperscript{24} Smith argues the direct involvement of veterans made the initial wave of battlefield preservation the most successful.\textsuperscript{25} In the case of America’s first five military parks—Gettysburg, Chickamauga and Chattanooga, Shiloh, Antietam, and Vicksburg—commissions were composed of both Union and Confederate veterans. Working in tandem, the acquisition, development, support for and maintenance of these parks were easily achieved. For the veterans of the Civil War, “the war was the defining

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War first organizing in 1881, then later Sons of Confederate Veterans formed in Richmond, Virginia, in 1896; United Daughters’ of the Confederacy in 1890 first in Missouri and then with the Ladies’ Auxiliary of the Confederate Soldiers Home in Tennessee.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh, ed. \textit{The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture} (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 64.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Smith, 9.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Smith goes further in stating that the emotions and true experience which motivated the veterans to act on behalf of the battlefield commissions were far superior to any effort by the federal government. “The battlefield of the 1890s, unlike most others, were developed, built, and maintained by the veterans, and modern policy makers would do well to remember that fact... No park service employee was ever shot at on those grounds.” Smith, 9.
\end{itemize}
event of their lives,” and therefore the desire to memorialize the experience was personal and genuine.26 Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh state in their introduction to The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture, that the memory of the Civil War brought “a physical transformation of public space.”27 Emphasis on the majority of veteran activity is not inferring that the federal government did not play a necessary role in the establishment of these early Civil War parks. However, the transition of control leaving the hands of the veterans and into the oversight of the Government at the turn of the 20th century altered the potential for success of future Civil War preservation efforts.28

As early as the 1880s, Congress appropriated $50,000 to the battlefield preservation effort, and the public saw “a flood of federal activity” by the 1890s.29 It was popular to be supportive of Civil War preservation when the reality of war was recent and alive in memory, as it was during the 1902 plans for Washington, D.C. The suggestions of the Senate Park Commission to preserve the remnants of the Union fortifications surrounding the Nation’s Capital, which were threatened by development, came just forty years after the conflict.

At the end of the Civil War, Washington, D.C., and neighboring areas of Virginia and Maryland were literally encircled by its Civil War history. For these landscapes to be preserved, quick efforts would have to be made in purchasing them in order to retain that cultural heritage. Unfortunately, with each decade land costs were increasing and Civil

27 Fahs, 2.
28 Smith speaks negatively about the involvement of the federal government.
29 Smith, 21.
War veterans were dying, making the federal government the only entity with the necessary resources to execute the project.  

**Senate Park Commission and the Proposal of Fort Drive**

By the late nineteenth century, Washington, D.C., was behind in public park development, compared to other American cities. In 1901, Senator James McMillan of Michigan, Chairman of the District of Columbia Committee of the Senate, “secured authority for a study by experts of the steps that should be taken to develop and beautify the city in a manner appropriate to its purpose.” The Senate Park Commission (SPC) composed of Daniel H. Burnham (Chairman), Charles F. McKim, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and Augustus Saint-Gaudens gathered in 1901 to improve Pierre Charles L’Enfant’s Plan (1791) in honor of the City’s centennial celebration. The Commission created arguably the “most significant urban plan in American History,” which was approved by Congress on January 15, 1902. Although much of the Report focused on the Mall and central urban features of the developing city—the accompanying report, entitled *The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia* gave

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30 “The building of cemeteries was the first concerted involvement of the federal government in preservation and memorialization on a large scale.” Smith, 26. Although the national cemeteries excluded Confederate soldiers, “the park like, landscaped national cemeteries reflected the general emphasis on parks ... peaceful and serene silence for the dead and the mourners alike...[however] the last thing the veterans wanted was for the battlefield to be landscaped and made into recreational parks.” Smith, 8.


33 This commission was responsible for the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois, with the exception of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.

34 *Worthy of a Nation*, 113.
consideration to “the development of the entire park system of the District of Columbia.”

The Senate Park Commission Plan, referred to as the McMillan Plan, is best known for establishing the Mall and the Federal Center and calling for the construction of landmarks such as the Lincoln Memorial and Memorial Bridge. The Plan’s “principles of the French Renaissance garden art in restoring the Mall, [and]…. treatment of important public buildings” often overshadow the park system recommendations, which lay “beyond the beautification of the formal areas.”

The District of Columbia’s geography “provides an enriching experience” within its boundaries. For these defining characteristics, the SPC recommended the preservation of the City’s “exceptional natural beauty.” At the time of the McMillan Plan, parkway design was an ideal opportunity to marry the actions of preserving land and establishing public parks. Therefore, the Plan called for “numerous parkways linking Great Falls, Mount Vernon, Potomac River bridges, and existing parks.” Included in the Plan is a two-page section entitled “The Fort Drive.” Albeit brief, only two pages, the urgency to acquire and preserve the historic Civil War forts, as well as the picturesque

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35 Designing the Nation’s Capital, 1; Worthy of a Nation, 116.
36 Senator James McMillan of Michigan was “a millionaire and, by reputation, ‘one of the five senators who practically run the United States.’ McMillan was appointed to the Senate Centennial Committee on 16 February 1900, and five days later became chairman and spokesman of an ad hoc group to evaluate centennial projects.” Designing the Nation’s Capital, 6 & 7.
38 Wallace, 17.
39 Wallace, 17.
landscapes surrounding them, was clearly important enough to the SPC to designate a separate section. In keeping with the Civil War memorialization trend of the time, and to acknowledge the vistas the forts—highly placed on hills for military advantages—provided the city, the Commission recommended a recreational, scenic drive to serve as a park.

Pages 111 and 112 of *The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia* read:

While for the reasons already discussed no systematic series of minor reservations has been selected for the outlying districts, it is necessary to mention the chain of forts which occupied the higher summits in the northern part of the central section, extending from Fort Stevens, near Rock Creek Park, to Fort Thayer, near Reform School. The views from these points are impressive in proportion to their commanding military positions, and they are well worth acquirement as future local parks, in addition to any claim their historical and military interest may afford. The boundaries, shown upon map No. D-288, are fixed mainly with respect to the character of the views from each fort and the possibility and importance of keeping them permanently open. The areas of the proposed parks’ are therefore somewhat adjustable, depending upon the attitude of the landowners.

To connect the series advantage is taken of the street laid out for the purpose in the highway plans, but it should be increased to a more liberal width than now provided, which is only 90 feet between houses, the same as H street in the city. With the forts indicated on the map – Stevens, Totten, Slemmer, Bunker Hill, and Thayer and with such other small parks and view points as may be selected later, a northern park circuit of great interest would thus be formed, having views off into the country in contrast with the principal inner circuit of larger parks, presenting views chiefly south toward the city.

In the section east of the Anacostia a similar chain of hilltop forts marks the points of most commanding view. With the Anacostia and the Potomac below and the city of Washington spread out beyond the hills of Virginia in the distance, these are the most beautiful of the broad view to be had in the District. Forts Mahan, Chaplin, Sedwick, Du Pont, Davis, Baker, Stanton, Greble, and Battery Ricketts can be linked together readily by means of the permanent system of highways with a few modifications and some widening into a drive
comparable in beauty with that along the Potomac Palisades, but utterly different in character.

In connection with this hill-crest circuit, starting from the northeaster end of Anacostia Park and returning to the shore of the Potomac at the Potomac at the southern corner of the District is important to secure for other areas of considerable extent in the eastern section.

*The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia*, occupies the federal government’s attention to this day, although it as a priority has varied over the last one-hundred years. A further in-depth analysis of Fort Drive will follow in Chapters 3 and 4, but emphasis on the Senate Park Commission’s Plan could not be stressed enough, as it established Fort Drive: Phase One. The Senate Park Commission’s version of Fort Drive includes the use of forts Stevens, Totten, Slemmer, Bunker Hill and Thayer as public parks, and the use of linking forts Mahan, Chaplin, Sedwick, DuPont, Davis, Baker, Stanton, Greble, and Ricketts for the “system of highways.” Fully recognizing the rapid development at which the city was growing and was expected to grow, the SPC recommended that the Government acquire these lands in an orderly fashion. Liberties would be taken by the federal government in selecting the “proposed park” areas designated for Fort Drive throughout its many phases, but the conscientious pledge to abide by the McMillan Plan existed until the mid-twentieth century.

By 1900 the population in the D.C. Metropolitan area (which includes parts of Southern Maryland and Northern Virginia) was 299,676. Urbanization threatened the Civil War forts and the picturesque views as the landscapes lay only five miles from

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downtown. Growth, the City Beautiful movement, and the desire to set Washington, D.C., apart from any other city in terms of scenery and recreational parks shaped the role Fort Drive played in the McMillan Plan.\textsuperscript{42} Arguably, the SPC’s recommendations were ahead of their time, as much of the efforts toward fulfilling the suggestions would not occur for years to come.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{42} Senate Park Commission, \textit{Improvement Plan for the Parks in the City of Washington}, 57\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 1902.
\textsuperscript{43} Wallace, 17.
Chapter 3

Parkways on the National Register and the Capper-Cramton Act

As stated by Timothy Davis, in *America’s National Park Roads and Parkways*, “the National Park Service (NPS) created a world-renowned road system that provides access to America’s most treasured scenery.”

Although there is an endless supply of parkways from which Fort Drive could be compared, the need was to review the National Register nominations of parkways which Fort Drive was influenced by and had influenced. In Washington D.C., the definition of a parkway evolved according to the decade, rising transportation needs, and national trends. And, according to the “Parkways of the National Capital Region’s” National Register nomination “the national capital park system is composed of more than 8,761 acres and 74 miles of formal parkways.”

Assumption by the National Park Service that Fort Drive would best serve as an inclusion to the revised Civil War Defenses of Washington’s National Register nomination may be found less appropriate after review of the statements of significance for other National Capital Region parkways. All the parkways mentioned in this chapter are listed on the National Register and share similar histories. Therefore, might Fort Drive be eligible for an individual nomination as a district, like George Washington Memorial Parkway and Baltimore-Washington Parkway? Or, better served if incorporated in the multiple properties listing for “Parkways of the National Capital Region”?

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45 “Parkways of the National Capital Region,” Sec E, 6.
Early parkways were designed linear landscapes, with boulevards for recreational walking, biking and driving carriages. Concerns for health and the trend of beautification assisted the aesthetic of parkway design. It was Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, inspired by Parisian avenues in the 1860s, that named these landscaped boulevards, parkways. Pleasure drives were to be experienced by slow-moving horse-drawn carriages, but by the 1920s and 1930s parkway development flourished as popularity, affordability, and technological advancements in automobiles increased. Clearly the rise in automobile traffic demanded parkway design to adapt and respond to changing trends of transportation, and Fort Dive was no exception.

Parkways were constructed all across the country, because by 1930 parks were a necessary part of American life and seen as “ideal means of combining recreation, natural resource protection, and transportation.” According to the National Park Service in 1938, a parkway was for “recreational traffic; the avoidance of unsightly roadside development… to encourage the preservation of natural scenery.” The parkways suggested by the Senate Park Commission (1902) were integrated units of a larger

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connected park system for Washington, D.C.—a common method for urban reform and an appropriate measure for the conservation of its open landscapes.\textsuperscript{49}

Federal parkway planning not only involved the study of the alignment of roads to dramatize features of topography, but also it considered ways which recreational landscapes could be developed—rallying support from communities and gaining the Government’s approval for funding.\textsuperscript{50} Early parkways were the product of landscape architects. Fort Drive was to be a formal boulevard-parkway, like the other parkways proposed for the Nation’s Capital at the same time.\textsuperscript{51} Although Fort Drive: Phase One was most likely modeled after European parkway examples, it is undeniable that domestic standards weighed heavily on the plans as Fort Drive transitioned into the 1920s and 1930s.\textsuperscript{52}

In one early report supporting the construction of Fort Drive, the argument was made that “no European city has so noble a cataract in its vicinity as the Great Falls of the Potomac.”\textsuperscript{53} Thus, Fort Drive and its “magnificent piece of scenery” could assist in the desire to make Washington, D.C., like no other city in the world.\textsuperscript{54} However, the rising commonality of the automobile, developing transportation needs, and increasing

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\textsuperscript{49} Dalbey, 11.  \\
\textsuperscript{50} Deborah L. Rotman and Ellen-Rose Savulis, \textit{Shared Spaces and Divided Places} (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 194.  \\
\textsuperscript{51} John Charles Olmsted, “Classes of Parkways,” Landscape Architecture, Vol. 6 (Oct. 1915–Jan. 1916), 42. Interesting to note Frederick Law Olmsted preferred naturalistic while his son, member of the Senate Park Commission, argued for formal public designs.  \\
\textsuperscript{52} Phase One was modeled after European examples because of the Senate Park Commission’s extended European trip while drafting the Report.  \\
\textsuperscript{54} Eliot, “Fort Drive: Plan for a Parkway,”11.
\end{flushleft}
involvement of the federal government dramatically altered parkway design, causing plans for Fort Drive to change in order to accommodate the city’s needs.

Fort Drive and the built parkways found in Washington, D.C., are characteristically similar. Many of the reasons given under “site significance” in the nominations to the National Register for the parkways in and around the city apply equally to Fort Drive. Shared designs and designers connect Fort Drive with the history of the National Capital Region’s parkways much more than has previously been reported. The first shared characteristic being the model from which many NPS parkways were designed—the Bronx River Parkway.

The Bronx River Parkway

The Bronx River Parkway, a “naturalistic” parkway design, was established with the formation of the Bronx Parkway Commission in New York in 1906. Construction began in 1911 and was completed in 1925. Landscape features were designed by Hermann Markel, supervised by Gilmore D. Clarke, and engineered by Jay Downer. The Parkway spanned fifteen miles and followed the natural landscape and topography through New York City and Westchester County. Bronx River Parkway was “in keeping

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56 Dalbey, 70. The construction of the Bronx River Parkway was halted during World War I and construction could not begin until the majority of the land desired had been acquired.
with contemporary notions of informal landscape design, [and] its traffic circulation
features were the most sophisticated yet developed.”^57 The parkway drive

provided automobile owners with a recreational outlet, located by the natural
reserve beside the riverbank…a four-lane affair; its curvatures began with an
almost horse-and-buggy carriageway look in Bronx Park, then gradually eased out
into arcs of longer radii as the alignment crept northward. Because it was in a
valley, local streets could bridge overhead. The roadway had no dividers of any
kind…, but in two different places the northbound and southbound lanes were
separated to slip at independent levels around hillcocks with excellent stands of
trees— an early example of the divided roadway technique that later became
standard practice.^58

^57 Timothy Davis, “Changing Conceptions of an American Commemorative Landscape,” in *Places of
Commemoration: Search for Identity and Landscape Design*, ed. Jachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (Washington,
^58 Newton, 600.
In addition to addressing recreation and transportation issues, the planning of the Bronx River Parkway revealed that economic and land conservation could result from parkway development. The Bronx River Parkway required the removal, through purchase or condemnation proceedings, of families, businesses, and other developments— in the name of cleaning up the Bronx River. In effect, these removals amounted to slum clearance. When combined with the other motivating factor for the entire project — the construction of a road used for recreation and commuting, the cleaning up of a polluted river, the creation of a park, and the introduction of infrastructure that would promote middle-class suburban development— it is evident that the Parkway served as a

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59 Dalbey, 70.
motivating model for reformers, progress, [and] economic development interests.  

Figure 3.2


A portion of the Bronx River Parkway was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1990 and is referred to as the prototype for parkway design. The views contain pastoral landscapes in proximity to suburban New York, as well as provide a “sense of landscaped enclosure” with native Bronx River Valley’s vegetation. Listed under criteria A, because of its “association with events that have made a significant

60 Dalbey, 72.
61 Newton, 597.
contribution to the broad patterns of our history”, and criteria C for its “distinctive
characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction,” the Bronx River Parkway
has a period of significance dating from 1913 to 1930.  

Figure 3.3

Fort Drive was not unique in linking parks; in fact, after the success of the Bronx River Parkway, “the NPS realized that parkways could be used both to provide attractive links between individual park units and to serve as a destination themselves.”

Therefore, Bronx River Parkway influenced Charles W. Eliot’s Fort Drive proposal (1927). Fort Drive shared with the Bronx River Parkway the collaboration of Gilmore D. Clarke and Jay Downer. Jay Downer proposed recommendations for Fort Drive in 1940, and Gilmore Clarke, serving as the Chairman of the Commission of Fine Arts, recommended the alteration in Fort Drive’s design to be “increased from 2, 2-lane roads to 2, 3-lane roads” specifically based on his “experience with parkways in the New York area.” There is no denying after studying the great significance which Bronx River Parkway had on parkway designs that the National Capital Park and Planning Commission’s 1920s version of Fort Drive was to mimic its recreational, scenic and design success.

George Washington Memorial Parkway

In honor of the bicentennial of George Washington’s birth, the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway (MVMH) opened leading motorists from Arlington Memorial Bridge to Mount Vernon Estate in 1932. The road, constructed by the Department of Agriculture’s Bureau of Public Roads, involved the work of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.,

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64 America’s National Park Roads and Parkways, 10.
67 Approximately 15 miles.
Charles W. Moore II and Gilmore D. Clarke—along with efforts from the National Park Service, Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Park and Planning Commission. Although Rock Creek Parkway was the first federally proposed and designed parkway, the over-whelming atmosphere to celebrate George Washington’s birthday accelerated the development of MVMH—making it the first federally completed parkway. The highway was later renamed the George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP) to include future constructed sections north of the Memorial Bridge.

Besides honoring the memory of the first president, GWMP was to provide a greenway connector between the Nation’s Capital and Mount Vernon to showcase the natural landscape which contributed to the selection of D.C., as the site to host the federal government. The GWMP also protects the Potomac River from development and pollution, as the Bronx River Parkway proved possible. In fact, Timothy Davis writes in *Changing Conceptions of an American Commemorative Landscape* that the Bureau of Public Roads found Bronx River Parkway a “most suitable model for the memorial boulevard.”

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68 National Register for Historic Places Nomination Form, “George Washington Memorial Parkway” (1995), Sec. 8, 1. Important to note that Gilmore D. Clarke was the civil engineer and landscape architect for Bronx River Parkway.

69 George Washington Memorial Parkway: Long-Range Interpretive Plan, 3. The Bureau of Public Roads insisted on “referring to the project as a ‘highway’ rather than as an avenue, boulevard, or parkway…[to underscore] the agency’s determination that the memorial motorway should serve as a practical model for general highway construction and not be marginalized as an extravagant commemorative gesture.” Davis, “Changing Conceptions,” 162.

Figure 3.4

Automobiles on curving stretch of Mount Vernon Highway, date unknown. Image from Library of Congress, Digital Collection & Services.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{71} The Library of Congress’s Digital Collection mistakenly dates this photograph from 1920.
Figure 3.5

Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, Washington in the distance, date unknown. Image from Library of Congress, Digital Collection & Services.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{72} The Library of Congress’s Digital Collection mistakenly dates this photograph from 1920.
GWMP was expanded northward in 1939 and again in the 1960s. Today, GWMP is approximately forty miles long and includes over 7,000 acres of national park land. Overseen by the George Washington Memorial Park, a department within the National Capital Region of the National Park Service, GWMP includes the Civil War Defenses of Washington’s Fort Marcy, which was the last fort to be acquired by the NPS in 1959.73

The GWMP was listed on the National Register for Historic Places in 1995. Listed under criteria B for its association “with the lives of significant persons in or past” and criteria C for its “distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction,” GWMP has a period of significance from 1930 to 1966. The most heavily argued points for the significance of George Washington Memorial Parkway are its association to the McMillan Plan, “a long and continuous effort for the Washington, D.C., region,” affiliation with the Capper-Cramton Act which “established the funding and planning for the parkway, creating the means for design and construction between 1930 and 1966,” the “plans and designs by Olmsted, Eliot, and Clarke” and the “unparalleled views of the city” which the parkway provides.74 These heavily argued points are all true for Fort Drive. In fact, GWMP does have paralleled views provided by Fort Drive across the river— which the Senate Park Commission claimed were the best views of the City.75

73 The government purchased the parcel of land for $75,000 because the State of Virginia would not. National Park Service, National Capital Parks Land Record No. 322 held at the George Washington Memorial Parkway headquarters.
74 “George Washington Memorial Parkway,” Sec. 8, 1 & 2.
75 “With the Anacostia and the Potomac below and the city of Washington spread out beyond the hills of Virginia in the distance, these are the most beautiful of the broad view to be had in the District.” Senate Park Commission, 112.
Figure 3.6

Figure 3.7

GWMP’s Vistas. Image from America’s National Park Roads and Parkways, 263
Interestingly, the GWMP was not originally proposed by the Senate Park Commission; in fact, “Northern Virginia lay beyond the commission’s geographic mandate.” The Commission, however, knowing of the proposals to make the Parkway a “national road of pilgrimage” to Washington feared tasteless inclusions of monuments and man-made structures immortalizing Washington, as was the trend during the age of memorialization. Therefore, the SPC recommended that the drive “serve as an extension of the park system of the District of Columbia” to bring uniformity to the overall plan.

Fort Drive was also not an original concept of the Senate Park Commission, but was proposed in the 1890s District of Columbia Highway Map. Therefore, the SPC considered both the MVMH and Fort Drive significant enough projects to include their opinions.

Similar to the Bronx River Parkway, the GWMP is said to be “an instrument of conservation and protection of scenic and recreational resources.” However, according to Timothy Davis, MVMH as a parkway, “made no great aesthetic or technical advances” in parkway design, yet the National Register for Historic Places has it listed under criteria C. It is possible to consider, that if Fort Drive had been completed as it was proposed, MVMH/GWMP would not have claim to its distinctive character— as it would have been one piece of a grander whole.

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76 Davis, 156.
77 Davis, 156.
79 “George Washington Memorial Parkway,” Sec. 8, 2.
80 Davis, 133.
Fort Drive and GWMP are additionally connected through the National Capital Park and Planning Commission. The projects were planned side-by-side within the Commission, and it just so happened that the commemoration of Washington’s birth preceded the centennial of the Civil War and came at a time when the federal government’s support was at its apex. To carry the connection between Fort Drive and GWMP further—plans for a bridge south of Fort Washington (MD) to Mount Vernon (VA) at which Fort Drive would end and GWMP would begin, tied the two similar-styled parkways together. GWMP and Fort Drive were to be part of the greater network of highways in the District.

**Rock Creek Parkway**

Rock Creek Park was established in 1890 as a nature preserve. The Rock Creek Valley served as a barrier between Georgetown, Washington City and Washington County, and the Senate Park Commission recommended it as the entrance to the comprehensive park system of the Nation’s Capital, the same park system which included Fort Drive. The Senate Park Commission member, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., provided his direct assistance throughout the Rock Creek Parkway project; and in a report stated “the dominant consideration never to be subordinate to any other purpose in dealing with Rock Creek Park, is the permanent preservation of its wonderful natural beauty, and making that beauty accessible to people without spoiling the scenery in the process.”

By 1913, President William Howard Taft signed legislation for additional lands to be

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81 *Designing the Nation’s Capital*, 166.
acquired to construct a parkway connecting Potomac Park (established in 1897), Zoological Park (established in 1889) and Rock Creek Park. This authorization made Rock Creek Parkway the first planned parkway in the metropolitan area. Running approximately three miles, the construction of the four lanes of Rock Creek Parkway began in 1929 and was completed in 1936. One of the most successful results of the Rock Creek Parkway, like Bronx River Parkway, was the ability to buffer motorists from the surrounding cityscape and contain them in a wooded environment.

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Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway were listed on the National Register for Historic Places in 2005. Listed under criteria A for its “association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history” and criteria C because it embodies “distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction,” Rock Creek Parkway has a long period of significance ranging from 1828 to 1951. Interesting to point out is that the date of significance includes earlier history of the site, not limiting the landscape to a single period of significance.

Fort Drive was to cut through Rock Creek Park via Military Road, since the park houses the Union fortification of Fort De Russy. Today, Rock Creek Park is a department of the National Capital Region of the National Park Service and oversees the Civil War Defenses of Washington’s Battery Kemble, Fort Bayard, Fort Reno, Fort De Russy, Fort Stevens, Fort Slocum, Fort Totten, and Fort Bunker Hill. Clearly Rock Creek Park and Fort Drive share a history.
The substantial arguments for Rock Creek Park’s significance are its connection to the “professionally acclaimed 1901–1902 Senate Park Commission” and the roadway’s reflection of “the evolution of American parkway design” — arguments that can directly be applied to Fort Drive. ⁸³

⁸³ “Rock Creek Parkway,” Sec. 8, 2.
Suitland Parkway

Suitland Parkway connects Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland to Washington, D.C. The parkway was to be a defense-highway that, when no longer needed, would be given to the management of the National Park Service. Construction began in September of 1943 and was finished by December 1944 (during World War II). Today the parkway is approximately nine miles long and includes over 400 acres of National Park Service land.

84 “The creation of Suitland Parkway was predicated on the strategic importance of establishing ‘an airfield of major proportion to protect the Atlantic Coast during the early stage of war [WWII].’” National Register for Historic Places Nomination Form, “Suitland Parkway” (1995), Section 7, 6.
Suitland Parkway, not as well-known as the District’s other parkways, was placed on the National Register for Historic Places in 1995. It meets criteria A for its association “with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history” and criteria C for embodying “distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction.” Suitland Parkway’s period of significance is from 1942 to 1944.
According to the nomination, the parkway is significant for the contribution to the “historic symbolism and design of the nation’s capital.” Unique to many of the parkways built earlier in the 20th century, Suitland Parkway was not meant to be a recreational pleasure drive but a “route of travel”; therefore, it “falls on the parkway end of the continuum of parkway to freeway” transition in the mid-20th century. Suitland Parkway mimics later designs of Fort Drive and portrays the period of parkway construction when non-military projects (Fort Drive) were postponed for military initiatives (Suitland Parkway).

The historical “significance” supporting Suitland Parkway’s nomination to the National Register is an argument that can be constructed for all the parkways previously mentioned,

Suitland Parkway is associated with key historical figures who played important roles in planning and design including Gilmore D. Clarke and Jay Downer, principal designers in the Westchester County and Virginia Parkways. NCP&PC Chairman Frederick Delano and Thomas Jeffers of the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission had substantial roles in the origins of the parkway, especially when funding sources seemed exhausted because of the depression and World War II.

This argument for the significance of Suitland Parkway is not original and, again, can be borrowed word-for-word to support Fort Drive’s significance.

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85 “Suitland Parkway,” Sec. 8, 1.
86 “Suitland Parkway,” Sec. 8, 1.
Baltimore-Washington Parkway

The Baltimore-Washington Parkway was a high speed parkway first considered in the 1930s. Plans published in the *Washington Star* in 1938, showed a modern thoroughfare serving as the primary commuter route between the two cities. The Baltimore-Washington Parkway was to provide a new approach to the District, granting motorists an alternate route from U.S. Highway No. 1. Different from the emerging roadways of the 1950s which were solely concerned with speed and managing high numbers of cars, the approximately nineteen mile parkway was “composed of generally forested, gentle hills with modest vistas.” The Thoroughfare Plan drafted by the National Capital Planning Commission in 1950, had the Baltimore-Washington Parkway connecting with Fort Drive in order “to link the entire northern section of the District of Columbia.”

The Baltimore-Washington Parkway was listed on the National Register for Historic Places in 1991, under criteria A and criteria C, and it was assigned a period of significance from 1942–1954. Similar to Fort Drive and the other parkways mentioned, Baltimore-Washington Parkway involved the work of Jay Downer, Gilmore D. Clarke,

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87 “The Anacostia Park project includes six miles of river frontage and several acres. When completed, the parkway will be an important link in the future Washington-Baltimore parkway.” “Draper Appointed to Anacostia Park,” *Washington Star*, March 8, 1933.
88 Newton, 333.
Charles Eliot II, and T.C. Jeffers. Significantly, the Baltimore-Washington Parkway does not provide “outstanding scenic features,” so, its significance lies in its “combination of expressway and parkway qualities.” The Baltimore-Washington Parkway is similar to the Bronx River Parkway as it brought a positive economic impact to the area—true of Fort Drive as well. Reported in 1965, “most of the development on land adjacent to the fort parks and their connecting strips of green area is good… Thus, the fort parks and their connections have had a positive, beneficial influence on the caliber of development along the route.” Therefore, much of the arguments used to defend Baltimore-Washington Parkway’s significance can be applied to Fort Drive.

Figure 3.11


Parkways of the National Capital Region

Although the previously mentioned parkways are classified on the National Register as districts, in 1991 the “Parkways of the National Capital Region, 1913–1965” was placed on the National Register as a multiple property. The “Parkways of the National Capital Region” consist of the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, Suitland Parkway, Mount Vernon Memorial Highway/George Washington Memorial Parkway, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and Sligo Branch Parkway. The multiple property listing argues the significance of these parkways as the
culmination of several national trends after the turn of the century; the City Beautiful movements’ emphasis on integrated urban green space; automobility and the rapid development of road systems; and the decline in the quality of city living and resulting popularity of outdoor recreation. In Washington, D.C., the McMillan Commission’s recommendation for a series of parks and parkways was coupled with the American Institute of Architect’s assessment of a cityscape badly in need of formal planning and directions — in keeping with the original eighteen-century urban scheme by Pierre L’Enfant. The four primary parkways and numerous small, regional strip parks— developed from 1913 to 1965 through the cooperative efforts of Maryland, Virginia, and District authorities—collectively represent all major jurisdictions for a parkway type thoroughfare. Consistently intended as a transportation route, the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and strip parks also represent natural-resource conservation efforts; the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway/George Washington Memorial Parkway, a ceremonial and recreational route; Suitland, a defense highway; and Baltimore-Washington Parkway, a defense intercity highway. After the precedent-setting network of suburban New York parkways— after which it was idealized—Washington’s system is the most comprehensive and monumental extant in the nation. Aesthetically unaltered, the parkways remain vital components of the regional transportation arteries and they continue to contribute to the historic symbolism and design of the nation’s capital.94

It is disappointing that the nomination form claiming to report the evolution of the urban parkway would not mention Fort Drive, the “crowning feature” of the entire park system.95 Whether or not Fort Drive deserves an independent National Register nomination can be debated by the National Park Service; however, if it is not eligible for an individual district listing, many of the existing individual statements of significance should be rewritten. Not only does Fort Drive share merit, but its inclusion strengthens the significance of all the existing parkways. As Norman T. Newton states in Design on the Land, a “parkway was not itself a road,” and therefore the absence of Fort Drive’s

94 “Parkways of the National Capital Region,” Sec. F, 1.
95 “Minutes from Meeting,” (February 1927).
landscape in the multiple property listings of the “Parkways of the National Capital Region” is inconsistent. Fort Drive contains the entire spectrum of parkway components within in the Nation’s Capital and so far the representation of parkways listed on the National Register emphasizes separate campaigns of the city’s overall transportation history.

The Capper-Cramton Act

The Capper-Cramton Act, named after Senator Arthur Capper and Representative Louis C. Cramton, was passed on May 29, 1930. The Act enabled the National Capital Planning Commission to purchase park lands, specifically for parks, playgrounds and parkways through federal loans and grants. The sum of $13.5 million was approved to be spent on lands acquired in nearby Virginia and Maryland deemed “necessary and desirable for the park and parkway system of the National Capital in the environs of Washington.” A sum of $16 million was approved to fund the purchase of lands specifically within the boundaries of the District. Both the House and Senate committees who listened to hearings in the month of March were “intensely interested in

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96 Netwon, 597.
98 It is important to note that the Capper-Cramton Act by name recognizes the George Washington Memorial Parkway project, making it the first federally funded parkway. Specific wording also states “Whenever the use of the Forts Washington, Foote, and Hunt, or either of them, is no longer deemed for military purposes they shall be turned over to the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital.” Fort Foote is included in the National Register nomination for CWDW, but if the landscapes surrounding the fort should be included under CWDW in relation to significance with Fort Drive—Fort Foote was clearly never associated with Fort Drive, but was intended for the continuation via a bridge of George Washington Memorial Parkway.
the Fort Drive." According to Louis Cramton, the drive linking the forts was “perhaps the most important single project in the district plan.” In fact, in many of the newspaper articles printed announcing the Act, Fort Drive was the first project mentioned that would benefit from the new legislation. Thus, the argument can be made that Fort Drive was the most promising parkway of the 1930s. The Capper-Cramton Act was a true milestone in the development of the Nation’s Capital, as it allowed the 1930s to be the most productive decade in the purchasing of park land—lands that today still exist and contribute to the National Capital Region of the National Park Service.

It was certainly the intent of the policy-makers, planners, and designers to include Fort Drive in the scenic and recreational amenities of the parkway system in the District. Study of its location and design helps to unify and enhance the significance of all the other parkways and furthermore seems to be the missing link in the evolution of D.C.’s transportation history.

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99 T.C. Jeffers, 3.
102 Mackintosh, 67 & 68.
Chapter 4
Fort Drive: 1920s, 1930s, 1940s

The evolution of the planning of Fort Drive is separated into seven phases: the Senate Park Commission (1902), Charles Eliot’s Report (1927), Jay Downer’s Recommendations (1940), Fowler-Dent/T.C. Jeffers’ Express Parkway (1947), Modern Thoroughfare Design (1950), Fred W. Tuemmler (1965), and Fort Circle Parks (1970–2000s). Each phase represents a dramatically different political environment in Washington, D.C., that ultimately inspired different roles for the project. The ‘Golden Age’ of Fort Drive occurred within the project’s first forty years, when the cost of the project could be afforded and the initiative endorsed by its leaders. With each later phase, however, more of the original intent was compromised—until the project was completely rethought in the 1950s.

National Capital Park and Planning Commission

The National Capital Park Commission was established in June of 1924 with the Park Commission Act (43 Stat. 463). The seven-member Commission included the Chief of Engineers of the Army, Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, Director of the National Park Service, Chief of the Forest Service, chairmen of the committees on the District of Columbia of the Senate and of the House of Representatives, and the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital. It was charged with developing a comprehensive plan for the National Capital Region and its environs. By April 1926, the Park Commission Act was amended to include planning, and the
organization was renamed, the National Capital Park and Planning Commission (NCPPC). The amended law authorized the President of the United States to appoint “four eminent citizens well qualified and experienced in city planning” in addition to the seven members. President Calvin Coolidge selected Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., Frederic A. Delano, J.C. Nichols, and Milton B. Medary, Jr.

Although the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) had been established in 1910 and was considered “the successor of the [Senate] Park Commission,” early focus was predominately on “key elements of the Senate Park Commission plan.” Therefore, other proposed plans, like those presented in The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia, were not dealt with in the CFA’s first twenty-five years. Different from the CFA, the NCPPC was given the power to acquire, via purchase or condemnation, lands in the District of Columbia for city planning initiatives such as parkways, playgrounds, and parks. The first priority, and arguably the most important, which NCPPC addressed was transportation. The newly established NCPPC, therefore,

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103 As of July 19, 1952, an act established the National Capital Planning Commission to succeed the agency of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission (66 Stat. 781). National Capital Planning Commission will be used when referring to the agency post-1952.
105 Letter Addressed to Maj. U.S. Grant 3rd from Everett Sanders, Secretary to the President dated May 21, 1926. Found in the National Capital Planning Commission’s archives.
106 Designing the Nation’s Capital, 262.
107 Designing the Nation’s Capital, 270.
dedicated their time and effort to designing a comprehensive thoroughfare plan for the city.\footnote{Because highways constitute the most important contribution made at public expense to the individual’s life, because they are the arteries through which the lifeblood of the community must circulate, and, finally because they are the specific part of the city in which the conditions have changed most in a very short time, ‘the battle of the streets’ commands our first attention.” National Capital Park and Planning Commission, “Annual Report 1926.” Washington, D.C.: 1926, 13.}

A grand thoroughfare plan had been included in the 1898 District of Columbia Highway Map.\footnote{The concept of Fort Drive may have occurred even earlier than 1898, with the publication of an 1869 Guidebook to the City. “About two miles outside of Washington, and completely encircling the city, is a chain of fortifications, completely connected by a military-road, forming a boulevard, which, by the aid of trees and shrubbery, judiciously cared for, would be equal to the famed drives surrounding the city of Paris.” A Guide to the City of Washington, What To See, and How To See It (Washington, DC: Philip & Solomons, 1869), 25 and 26.} City Engineer Commissioner William H. Powell suggested a drive "through the suburbs of Washington to be called 'Fort Drive’” to provide curving roadways to “some of the most important of the fortifications which served as the Defenses of Washington during the rebellion.”\footnote{“The Fort Drive: Major Powell’s Proposed Circuit of the War-Time Defenses,” The Evening Star, May 23, 1896.}

Therefore, the Senate Park Commission was not the first to recognize the great advantage an historic fort-to-fort drive would provide the city in both beauty and transportation. According to an article printed in the\footnote{“A Drive To The Forts,” Washington Post, April 19, 1896, pg. 12.} Washington Post on April 19, 1896, Powell’s proposal involved seven of the historic forts in five miles of a “magnificent speedway” to “number among the city’s most picturesque parks.\footnote{“Because highways constitute the most important contribution made at public expense to the individual’s life, because they are the arteries through which the lifeblood of the community must circulate, and, finally because they are the specific part of the city in which the conditions have changed most in a very short time, ‘the battle of the streets’ commands our first attention.” National Capital Park and Planning Commission, “Annual Report 1926.” Washington, D.C.: 1926, 13.}
Although Fort Drive is referred to as a thoroughfare in 1898 and again in 1902, no immediate action followed to construct such a road. 113 It was not until December 17, 1923, in the Senate Bill S. 1340 and later in the House Bill H.R. 4490 on January 3, 1924, that authorization to survey and study the feasibility of constructing Fort Drive was
Therefore, when NCPPC was established in 1926, the Commission inherited the task to “provide a beautiful boulevard connecting all parts of the District.”

By 1926, the government owned four of the forts.

Fort Drive and the 1920s

The topic of highway improvements dominated the agenda for the first meetings of the NCPPC. Fort Drive appears in the minutes of the second meeting of the Commission held on June 18, 1926. It is clear that a familiarity of Fort Drive existed among members of the Commission, as no in depth description to the details of the project are given. Instead, debates occur during the second meeting concerning the overall design and utilization of the proposed parkway as a major thoroughfare. The second meeting of NCPPC affirmed that the Drive was to be a constructed parkway, and not merely a plan for the widening of already existing city streets. The minutes read:

considerable discussion … to the future policy relative to the acquisition of desirable Fort tracts and the character of drive or boulevard connecting them, whether the connecting drives should have single or double roadways; whether they should be broad parkways or connecting streets constructed for rapid passage between larger parks; that such connections should be more attractive than ordinary city streets; that they should not be constructed to connect business districts, but for pleasure rather than commercial traffic; and that in some cases

114 “In 1919 Colonel Ridley submitted a report to Congress calling for Fort Drive and five years later Congress authorized a survey and study.” Worthy of A Nation, 223.
115 “Boulevard Girdle Urged For Capital.”
116 “Driveway Project Linking Forts, Will Be Pressed in 1926,” Washington Post, December 23, 1925. Interesting to note is the fact that this article was published before Fort Stevens was a park. Fort Stevens being the most popular of the Civil War Defenses of Washington, and the only fort to be restored. Signifying, that Fort Drive was at least as equally important as the preservation of the forts.
one type of boulevard might be provided connecting parkways, in others the connection would be by boulevard or highway.\textsuperscript{118}

It can be assumed, based on the date of the meeting and the growing popularity in parkway design, that the Commission reviewed, or at the very least was aware of, the 1923 report published on the success of the Bronx River Parkway. The men present for the second NCPPC meeting “took recess at 4:20 o’clock p.m. to personally inspect Fort Stevens, Fort Slocum, Piney Branch Valley and other portions of the District” to determine placement, direction, and the visual character of Fort Drive.\textsuperscript{119} Much about the Commission’s fieldtrip is unrecorded—but at the end of the tour a motion was made as follows:

motion was unanimously carried authorizing the acquisition of the tract including Fort Slocum in such a way as to preserve all the forest and the valley south and southeast of the forest as an approach thereto, as per plat to be prepared.\textsuperscript{120}

This action suggests that the Commission was cognizant of threats to the neglected Civil War forts and the surrounding landscapes. Immediate action after the fieldtrip also confirms that this area, adjacent to Fort Stevens, was held in high regard and given priority over other sections of the project.\textsuperscript{121}

Official plans for Fort Drive were not devised during the initial meetings of the Commission. In fact, no one plan was ever approved in its virgin form— plans were

\textsuperscript{119} “Minutes from Meeting,” June 1926.
\textsuperscript{120} “Minutes from Meeting,” June 1926.
\textsuperscript{121} Fort Stevens was said to have been acquired on October 15, 1925, although it does not appear to be the case on the December 1926 map that accompanied Charles Eliot’s Report.
always in the state of revision. The Drive was often presented to the Commission as an option A, option B, or option C format; and then voted upon based on cost, desirability, existing development, and proximity of other roads that could be adopted. Once voted on by the Commission, uncontrollable externalities such as fluctuating land values, the Great Depression, World War II, and time-consuming litigation battles caused even more variations. Thus, Fort Drive’s parkway design was ever-changing.122

The multiple options presented to the Commission included price comparisons on the land, alternative design techniques, and construction cost estimates. A section of Fort Drive would be first presented to the Commission, discussed and sent back for more review and research. After agreement, purchase of the land proved to be more challenging and time consuming than expected. These board discussions often resulted in further approval processes to either increase the initial allowance allotted for the land or to proceed with acquisition through condemnation. The slow moving bureaucratic process resulted in sudden and drastic increases in land values. It was apparent that any hesitation by the Commission to act on acquiring land increased costs and indirectly caused revision to the path of Fort Drive.

The difficulty of planning a large circumferential parkway in Washington, D.C., is illustrated by the acquisition of the Fort Stevens to Fort Slocum connection. As several routes were presented by the City Planner, the section of land which the Commission desired was found to have two new houses under construction in the elapsed time from

approving the purchase to the next NCPPC meeting. Such hesitation increased the value of that particular section by $40,000. This was a fairly typical occurrence during the acquisition of Fort Drive and resulted in the loss of support among Congress. The Commission was most supportive of Fort Drive, however, as the process prolonged over decades, Fort Drive was pushed further down on the priority list.

**Phase Two: Charles Eliot’s Report**

Although Fort Drive’s second phase arguably began with the establishment of the NCPPC, it’s defined with the February 1927 “Fort Drive: Plan for a Parkway Connecting the Civil War Forts and Encircling the City of Washington” presented by City Planner Charles W. Eliot II. Eliot, a very young city planner at this point, supported Olmsted and Vaux’s early visions for parkways, with the theory that “parkways should connect parks” but have a “greater purpose … to connect cities with suburbs and the countryside.”

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123 Eliot presented a preliminary report to the Commission in December 1926.
124 MacDonald, 134.
Eliot envisioned Fort Drive as an entrance to the city, where “coming across the beautiful Anacostia hills …. the remaining earthworks of the old Civil War Fort Chaplin commands a wonderful view of the City clear to Arlington.”\(^\text{125}\) Accompanying Eliot’s Report was the map “Park Progress, District of Columbia, 1901-1926.”

Figure 4.3

This map displays the additions made to Washington, D.C.’s park system and the parks that had been acquired in accordance with the 1902 McMillan Plan. Map from the National Capital Planning Commission’s archives.

At the time of Eliot’s Report, the Civil War fortifications that were acquired (east to west) included Fort Bayard, Fort Reno, Fort Dupont, and Fort Davis. Although documentation suggests Fort Stevens was purchased on October 15, 1925, it is marked as a “proposed park” by this map. Eliot’s overall proposals and additions to Fort Drive is an example of the efforts made by the NCPPC to apply, as well as update, the Senate Park Commission’s vision. The delay in action by the federal government to implement the
SPC’s recommendation to preserve most of the Civil War sites, caused sites to be lost in the twenty-five years between phase one and phase two of Fort Drive. Thus, liberties were taken to establish new suitable connections.  

Elliot’s Report is the most detailed and extensive proposal on Fort Drive. Elliot intended the Report to not only paint Fort Drive in idyllic form to “give the effect of a green strip all the way” around the City, but also to serve as a tool to build support in favor of the expensive project.  

Elliot’s document envisioned Fort Drive as the “most famous and striking and well-known parkway” in Washington, D.C. It was to be “a continuous, unbroken, easily followed, wooded road…. Starting from the splendid woods skirting the Receiving Reservoir…. and terminating at Fort Washington.” Elliot proposed the drive to cover a “distance of some twenty-two and eight-tenths miles from Conduit Road to Blue Plains.” The design was to be “something different from the typical city street…. [consisting] of long, safe, sweeping curves, [with] the view constantly changing [to reveal] new things of interest … at every turn.” Fort Drive was to be the first installment of the first city-wide comprehensive park and parkway system.  

Reviewing Elliot’s Report reveals an internal debate. Elliot urges the Commission to create new streets and discourages the practice of using existing streets. He warns that

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126 “In 1901 it was proposed to turn south [at Fort Totten] and proceed via Forts Slemmer, Bunker Hill and Thayer, but since that time the sites of both Forts Slemmer and Thayer have been built over and building operations between the forts make a suitable connection practically impossible.” Elliot, “Plan for a Parkway,” 8.  
128 National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Minutes from March 1928 Meeting.  
129 Elliot, “Plan for a Parkway,” 11.  
if already existing streets are used for Fort Drive, it will be “nothing more nor less than a name attached to specifically chosen streets.”

Although recycling streets was the cheaper option, Eliot insists the construction of Fort Drive to be a “Park Drive,” contributing to the entire green-scape of D.C. Eliot’s phase called for more lands to be acquired for Fort Drive than the original amount proposed by SPC. Justification for the cost of these roads was that they were to be parks, and parks enriched all lives. And, all together Fort Drive and the forts would become the “crowning feature of the [park] system.”

At the time of Eliot’s Report, Rock Creek Park and Potomac Park had been established and Anacostia Park was in its planning stages. Even in the success of Rock Creek Park, Fort Drive was planned to be the “distinctive feature.” Fort Drive was the link for the entire district system and was to “be enjoyed by more people than all the other [parks] combined.” Eliot’s phase of Fort Drive began at Battery Kemble and included the sites of Fort Reno, Battery Smeade, Fort De Russy, Fort Stevens, Fort Slocum, Fort Totten, Fort Lincoln, Fort Mahan, Fort Chaplin, Fort Dupont, Fort Davis, Fort Baker, Fort Wagner, Battery Ricketts, Fort Stanton, Fort Carroll, Fort Greble, Fort Foote and Fort Washington. And, in his plan with the title “Fort Drive,” and not the preservation of the Civil War forts, he intended “each fort [to] be set in a park from ten to

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133 Rotman, 195.
135 “Minutes from Meeting,” March 1928.
137 Fort Baker and Fort Wagner do not exist on the current Civil War Defenses of Washington Map.
several hundred acres large” to preserve the forts as parks, not as a comprehensive measure to preserve the forts themselves as artificats.138

Although often misreported in newspapers, Fort Drive was never to include all the Civil War sites in the area.139 The Senate Park Commission stipulated that as many forts as possible should be purchased and included in Fort Drive, but only within the District of Columbia’s boundaries. Not only were many forts lost by Eliot’s 1927 plans to discourage the inclusion of all forts, but also, if the forts in Virginia were to have been considered, the overall concept of a continuous wooded forest road would not have been possible. Although Eliot’s plans do include Fort Foote and Fort Washington (1824) located in Maryland, they were to be part of Fort Drive and GWMP’s connection. Therefore, the early phases of Fort Drive and the establishment of the fort parks solely involved the forts which fell under the District of Columbia’s jurisdiction.140

Eliot’s report dated February 1927 was the same time that the National Capital Park and Planning Commission was “working for the richest client in the world”, and the nation was “so inconceivably wealthy and developing in wealth as never before.”141 Therefore, when Eliot suggested the use of “one-tenth of one percent of the [Government’s] year’s expenditures” toward Fort Drive, it was feasible and not meet with great opposition.142 Phase Two of Fort Drive was to cost the federal government

139 “The Fort Drive will include all sites of Civil War forts of the city,” was reported in “Fort Drive Park Plans Studied By Commission,” Washington Post, November 17, 1927.
140 Maryland’s National Capital Planning Commission did work together with the National Capital Park and Planning Commission in favor of the network of highways. Virginia was not so accommodating.
$3.75 million which was considered to be an appropriate sum to “promptly furnish the funds needed” for Fort Drive.\(^{143}\) Two years later in the 1929 Annual Report the Commission stated that seven forts were acquired according to Eliot’s plan.\(^{144}\) Such a statement displays a project steadily moving forward, as the effects of the Great Depression were not yet felt.

Although the Annual Reports published by NCPPC routinely separate discussion on the Civil War forts and Fort Drive, acknowledgment is made in the section under forts, that “the historic interest attaching to the ‘defenses of Washington’ and the remarkable views obtainable from the old forts has led to a demand that these sites should be held by the public for park purposes and that a connecting drive should be built between them.”\(^{145}\) The Commission inextricably linked the preservation of the forts to the Fort Drive project stating that the forts’ “historic interest” was in their attachment.\(^{146}\) Therefore, the scenic overlooks were more important than the physical remains of the fortifications. By 1929, the intended project was to cover a distance of 22.8 miles in “a continuous parkway wholly within the District of Columbia.”\(^{147}\) Due to the lack of funds from Congress, it was not possible for NCPPC to purchase the remaining forts and connecting lands.\(^{148}\) However, NCPPC was still determined that Fort Drive “would constitute the most striking and famous parkway in this part of the country.”\(^{149}\)

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\(^{143}\) Eliot, “Plan for a Parkway,” 12.
Park areas acquired between July 1, 1928, and June 30, 1929, are indicated in black and assigned to numbers on this map. Map from National Capital Planning Commission archives.

Park areas acquired in 1929 are numbers 11-Fort Slocum (via condemnation), 16-Fort Mahan, 17-Fort Dupont, and 18-Fort Stanton (via condemnation). Additional lands were added to the earlier acquired Fort Dupont. The purchase of Fort Mahan parkland not only contributed to the preservation of the earthworks, “an important element in the
proposed Fort Drive” but also “provided playground area for the use of the colored population in that section of Washington.”

During the Great Depression, the federal government was the primary employer through the Works Project Administration; therefore, projects were continued in the National Capital Region. Although numerous historians misreport that the Depression halted progress of Fort Drive because funds were not available, the Capper-Cramton Act of 1930 made possible funding not previously granted by Congress for the acquisition of parklands. The Commission was granted authority to acquire land for parks through annual appropriations. Although a boost in funding to construct Fort Drive was provided, efforts to convince the need for its priority over other projects became more difficult. The 1930 Annual Report expressed the urgency in fast acquisition of the proposed lands with the allotted amount of money from Capper-Cramton, stating “if every dollar expended is to bring in its maximum return … the whole capital investment should be made within a short period, say three years, to avoid the development for other purposes of the land needed and the excessive increase in cost.” This warning from the Commission in 1930 was prescient as Fort Drive’s progress continued at a snail’s pace.

The year 1931 was a productive one for the development of Fort Drive. The Annual Report of the NCPPC reported seven land acquisitions specifically for Fort Drive

and eleven in total including some Civil War forts. The seven Fort Drive parcels are shown by the map’s numbers #7, 8, 19, 20, 21, 31, 33.

**Figure 4.5**

![Map showing park areas acquired in 1931](image)

Park areas acquired in 1931 are indicated in black and assigned to numbers. Map from National Capital Planning Commission archives.

These acquisitions were Reno to Connecticut Avenue, “a beautiful wooded hillside facing Broad Branch Road and adjoining Rock Creek Park”, “two pieces of property” alongside

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152 Of these include, “thirteen acres of the estate of the late Victor J. Evans...the land adjoins Fort Kimble” and “30 acres of land near the Benning Race Track Site.” “Park Body Acquires Evans Estate Land: 13 Acres Are Obtained as Link in Fort Drive Project for District,” *Washington Post*, June 20, 1931 and “30 Acres Purchased For Fort Drive Parkway,” *Washington Post*, December 20, 1931.
Military Road, routes from Fort Stevens to Fort Slocum, Fort Slocum to Fort Totten, Mahan to Dupont by way of Fort Chaplin, and a “beautiful valley and a hilltop commanding sweeping views” between Fort Davis and Fort Stanton.\(^{153}\)

So, acquisition went ahead, but not at a significant pace.

**The Film, *A Future Park System for Washington and Its Environs***

A silent film, entitled *A Future Park System for Washington and Its Environs*, was made for the National Capital Park and Planning Commission in 1932. The content of the film was “shown before numerous organizations” in hopes to publicize and gain support for NCPPC’s plans for the environs.\(^{154}\) The film has three sections and designates two to Fort Drive. Visuals of proposed routes (not the exact streets) as well as footage of the chosen parks, and vistas of Washington which the Drive would provide, were revealed.


\(^{154}\) “Park Film Produced: Movie Is Made for Park Board in Small Size,” *Washington Star*, March 27, 1933.
The video is a visual plan of Charles Eliot’s 1927 proposal. The film states that Fort Drive is “a parkway connecting the principal Civil War forts encircling the city.” Again, the usage of the word “principal” does not encompass all of the Civil War forts. The route proposed in the film begins with the Potomac Palisades “up a wooded valley” to Fort Reno. Fort Reno is selected because it provides “the highest elevation in the District of Columbia.” From Fort Reno the drive continues to the site of Fort Kerney where “Broad Branch, a sparkling tributary to Rock Creek, will enhance the charm of Fort Drive.” Driving down previously constructed Broad Branch, the motorist arrives at
Fort De Russy where “the route of the present Military Road through Rock Creek Park” takes them to Fort Stevens. “From Fort Stevens the parkway turns east to Fort Slocum”, then to Fort Totten, which is “one of the largest of the Civil War forts [and] still retains some of its breastworks, trenches and rifle pits.” Then the Drive turns northeast at Fort Totten to “McKinley Hill, another important point of interest overlook[ing] the northeast part of the region.” From there the next stop is Fort Lincoln, then south to Fort Mahan, and onto Fort Chaplin which “looks over the eastern section of the city toward the Capitol.” Continuation to Coldren Hill, where an “excellent view is obtained” while on the way to Fort Dupont. At the time of the film’s production, “the area about Fort Dupont is being developed as one of the major park projects of the Washington Park System.” From Fort Dupont, it is a short jaunt to Fort Davis which “has been developed as a picnic grove and outing grounds.” Next is Fort Stanton which “looks back toward the Anacostia Flats and the Capitol,” then to the site of Fort Snyder, and Fort Carroll which overlooks “Bolling Field, and the juncture of the Potomac River, Washington Channel and Anacostia River.” The Drive terminates at Fort Greble, making “these proposed parks… constitute the park system of the District of Columbia.”

Although Eliot’s plan included Fort Foote and Fort Washington, the film clarifies their role in Fort Drive to be a part of a grander “regional park system” where “Fort Drive will be extended to become part of the George Washington Memorial Parkway.” This inclusion in the film reveals the great esteem with which the NCPPC held Fort

Drive. For MVMH had just recently been constructed and was considered the “bicentennial’s most notable commemorative achievement.”\textsuperscript{156} Therefore, Fort Drive at the very least must have been considered potentially as important as MVMH.\textsuperscript{157}

\textbf{Figure 4.7}

HAER Drawing, by Robert Dawson and Ed Lupyak, 1994. Image from \textit{America’s National Park Roads and Parkways}, 262. Star marks where the proposed GWMP would have met Fort Drive.

Six more fortifications were acquired in 1932 and an “attractively wooded lands along Eastern Avenue were acquired for the Fort Drive.”\textsuperscript{158} This parcel of land can be seen on the map between Fort Totten and Fort Lincoln, designated by number #14.\textsuperscript{159}

\textsuperscript{156} Davis, 131.
\textsuperscript{157} By November of 1932, 8.8 acres of land had been acquired “about a mile beyond the District line on Conduit road” for the George Washington Memorial Parkway in Maryland. “Ban On Purchase Of Fort Drive Land Perils Program,” \textit{Washington Star}, November 9, 1932.
Figure 4.8

Park areas acquired in 1932 are indicated in black and assigned to numbers. Map from National Capital Planning Commission’s archives.

As an invaluable resource this film provides insight into the vast landscape which NCPPC was attempting to organize, and the grand-scale of the project during the 1930s. Fort Drive was not to be a lone parkway, like Rock Creek Parkway or the George

159 Fort Totten was purchased in 1932, and the Washington Post reported its acquisition in the article “New Property Acquired As Link in Fort Drive” on July 18, 1932. The article stated “purchase of the Fort Totten property, northeast of Soliders’ Home bordering on Bates road, consisting of 40 acres.”
Washington Parkway, but the major thoroughfare and park system. Fort Drive’s design proposals by the NCPPC foreshadowed the beltway system that now encircles Washington, D.C.

In August of 1933, the Interior Department took control of the Office of Public Buildings and Parks—transferring Washington, D.C.’s military parks and battlegrounds to the National Park Service.\(^{160}\) In 1933 the NCPPC requested four sections of Fort Drive be included on the list for the Public Works Project. The sections included the construction of the Drive at Fort Reno, Chesapeake Street to Connecticut Avenue, 8\(^{th}\) Street to Kansas Avenue, Madison Street to Fort Totten, and Bladensburg Road to Kenilworth Avenue. Although sections would again be requested for inclusion in the Public Works Project in 1935, Fort Drive was never allotted funding directly through the Public Works Act.

In September of 1933, a report was presented on the streets to be closed for Fort Drive. Such streets included Branch Avenue to Naylor Road (linking Fort Stanton to Battery Ricketts), Naylor Road to Good Hope Road (near Fort Stanton), the ends of both Klingle and Lowell Streets (near Battery Kemble), Rock Creek Ford Road (near Fort Stevens), Madison Street at 3\(^{rd}\) and 4\(^{th}\) (near Fort Slocum), and Waclark Place at Portland Street (near Fort Stanton). These streets were never closed and remain on the District map today.

Despite disappointment from these unmet requests, by September of 1935 eight miles of the Drive were acquired, seven miles were near acquisition, and “one mile or

more” was constructed. In previous considerations of Fort Drive, it was unclear if sections of Fort Drive were constructed. Now, it can clearly be stated that land was acquired, and approximately one mile turned into road. A report drafted by landscape architect, T.C. Jeffers presented to NCPPC in 1935, proves that portions of the parkway were in fact installed. According to Jeffers’ three roads had been constructed. The three roads were in Section C— from DeRussy Street to Nebraska Avenue, Section G— from Queens Chapel Road to Bunker Hill Road, Eastern Avenue, and Section L—through Fort Dupont to Branch Avenue. Also reported, was that four parcels were ready for construction. Section E— from Riggs Road to Fort Totten, Section L— from Pennsylvania Avenue to Branch Avenue, Section M— from Branch Avenue to Good Hope Road, and Section O—Nichols Avenue to Atlantic Avenue. Clearly, discovery of this report debunks previously made claims that portions of Fort Drive were not constructed. Use of existing roads like Military Road, Eastern Avenue and Broad Branch Road, were incorporated in Fort Drive, but were designated separately.

According to the minutes from the September meeting of 1935, “through Fort Dupont (1), the C.C.C. men are grading the Fort Drive, and all land is acquired or under condemnation.” Thanks to Park Ranger James Rosentock, visual evidence of the

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162 “Minutes from Meeting,” September 1935.
163 HABS CCC report also suggests Fort Davis Drive to have been developed by CCC, but there are some very unusual references to the items being deleted from the report based on a report at NARA.
constructed Section L by the Civilian Conservation Corps, confirms the statement from September 1935.\textsuperscript{164}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4.9.jpg}
\caption{Civilian Conservation Corps work on Section L, 1935. Courtesy of Park Ranger J. Rosenstock at National Capital Parks-East.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{164} Park Ranger James Rosenstock uncovered photographs in his office at National Capital Parks-East and provided them in support of this thesis in summer 2011.
On October 10, 1937, the Washington Post ran an article titled “One More Mile and the District Will Have a Driveway Linking Forts.” Reporting that only by sheer perseverance has the commission been able to accumulate 22 ½ miles already in its possession of ‘deeds to which are being drawn up.’ It has bargained, ‘lain in wait,’ inched along, and—as a last resort—condemned….. In two opposite parts of the District parts of the new drive can be already be seen. Counting roads already owned by the Government, 3 ½ miles of it is finished. Actually 7-10 miles off Wisconsin Avenue in the Fort Reno and Woodrow Wilson High School area have been completed. In addition, 7-10 miles between Fort Davis and Fort Dupont have been graded.  

The article praises Fort Drive saying “the Drive itself is an integral part of the parkway planned around the District. The fort sites and other acquired playground and park areas are being developed in conjunction with it.”\textsuperscript{166} Again, preservation efforts for the Civil War forts were taking place in conjunction with the Fort Drive project.

\textsuperscript{166} Sadler, B5.
By 1938, growing concerns for the increasing problem of traffic congestion in and around Washington could no longer be ignored. The Commission realized that they would have to “fight just as hard to keep the land [they already acquired] as [they] did to get it.”\textsuperscript{167} It was reported, that “despite the depression, development in this area has

\textsuperscript{167} \textit{Sadler, B5}. 
increased tremendously, and usable land is at a premium.” Considerations to accommodate the City’s needs and ultimately change the role of Fort Drive to help relieve traffic prompted the next phase of Fort Drive. The next phase considered was one that more closely adopted design concepts from developing higher speed/commuter parkways, which gave less emphasis on scenic and recreational features—characteristics that had previously defined Fort Drive.

**Phase Three: Jay Downer’s Report**

On April 3, 1940, Jay Downer, former Engineer of the Westchester County, New York Park Commission, was employed as a consultant to review Charles Eliot’s 1927 plans for Fort Drive. By September 1940, Downer made additional land acquisition recommendations and re-estimated the cost of the project. In 1927, Eliot estimated Fort Drive to require $3.75 million. In 1940, Jay Downer presented the estimation of a figure more closely to $12 or $15 million. This costly estimation followed Chairman Frederic A. Delano’s letter to the *Washington Star*, printed December 28, 1939, pleading for more legislation to be passed similar to that of the 1930 Capper-Cramton Act. In his letter, Delano claims further funding must be found in order to develop the necessary approach to the City. Delano argues for the developments to be “spread over 10 to 20 years.” Jay Downer’s recommendations therefore did not appear to be earthshattering in the minds of the Commission members. Therefore, by October, the Commission, eager to

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170 “Mr. Delano Advocates Another Program.”
meet the City’s transportation needs and adapt their conceptual plan of Fort Drive to a modern parkway design, approved Downer’s plans.

Phase One of Fort Drive was influenced by the Senate Park Commission’s time spent in Europe, Phase Two of Fort Drive was modeled from the success of the Bronx River Parkway, but Phase Three of Fort Drive was influenced by the developing designs of the Baltimore-Washington Parkway. Qualities of the new modern parkway design “intended to facilitate as few human errors as possible, included streamlined curves, eliminated at-grade crossings, and provided one-way lanes divided by a median.”¹⁷¹ No longer was the winding road and changing scenery with every turn a priority. Downer’s phase for Fort Drive uniquely differentiated from other earlier roles because it included interim milestones, requesting progressions of Fort Drive to be enacted over a ten year period. Jay Downer’s proposal was the point in Fort Drive’s history where the concept of a scenic parkway was abandoned, and the idea of a freeway adopted. With the shape of Fort Drive being circular and now capable to cater high-speed traffic, Fort Drive by 1940 was without question the “precursor of Washington’s beltway.”¹⁷²

At the time of Jay Downer’s proposal, the Commission requested Congress pass a bill increasing the gasoline tax from the current $0.02 to $0.03— so that some of the tax money could fund Fort Drive. The Commission formalized this request in a letter to Senator Harold H. Burton on November 15, 1941, and received a response on December 3, 1941, endorsing the request; however, four days later the United States was attacked.

¹⁷¹ Shaheen, 7.
¹⁷² *Worthy of a Nation*, 225.
by Japan at Pearl Harbor. Although the bill to increase gasoline tax was approved, all non-military construction ceased as the country prepared for war.  

Phase Four: Fowler-Dent and the Abandonment of Fort Drive

In January of 1947, the District Budget Officer, Walter Fowler and the District Assessor, Edward Dent, released a report to Congress requesting the full abandonment of Fort Drive for “use of the land for more practical purposes.” The Report argued that few citizens paying taxes to fund the project were actually aware of Fort Drive, stating “although it already cost them millions” in tax dollars “it may have made sense from the viewpoint of fifty years ago [but makes] no sense today.” The District Commissioners supported the idea that the City’s financial problems could be solved by selling the non-taxable publicly-owned land for private development. Because, at the time of this report, Fort Drive was not completed as a road and involved 1252.67 acres of the Washington, D.C.’s park system, it was an easy target. The report came as a surprise to the NCPPC. In a rebuttal, uncovered in the minutes from the Commission’s January meeting, the NCPPC defended the integrity of Fort Drive, stating that

the Commission reiterates its opinion and judgment that the Fort Drive was a noble and practical conception… that it is more in need than ever before… [and

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173 The gasoline tax was raised half a cent, and the funds went to the Department of Defense.
175 “Minutes from Meeting, “January 1947, Appendix B. Much of the concern for the uselessness of Fort Drive stemmed from the belief that Fort Drive could never be completed.
176 “The land acquired for the Drive out of District money connecting the forts and batteries comprises of 723.68 acres and the land for the forts and batteries comprises of 528.99 acres, or a total of 1252.67 acres.” “Minutes from Meeting,” January 1947, Appendix B.
that the Commission] will continue to press for an orderly progressive
development of this much needed circumferential, traffic-distribution roadway.\footnote{Minutes from Meeting,} January 1947. “In a five minute radio interview on February 23, 1947, Major General U.S. Grant, chairman of NCPPC, disputed their [Fowler and Dent’s] figures. Grant disputed the Fowler-Dent Report’s claim that $4,000,000 had already been spent on the drive and that $600,000 was still needed to acquire land. He corrected their estimates stating that only $2,803,119.70 had been spent on land for the drive and that 98.8 percent of land had already been acquired.” Shaheen, 13.

As a result of this threat to Fort Drive— which directly came from the cost projections of Jay Downer’s ten-year project proposal which was to tie up “most of the D.C. funds available for new construction,” —a study on the history of the entire project was quickly conducted and presented to the Commission in March, 1947.\footnote{National Capital Park and Planning Commission, “Minutes from Meeting.” Washington, D.C.: March 1947, 5.}

Phase Four: Fort Drive, therefore, was the “Plan for Minimum Construction and Minimum Cost” drafted by T.C. Jeffers just seven years after Jay Downer’s recommendations.\footnote{Minutes from Meeting,} March 1947. The motivation to present and approve, yet again, another plan for Fort Drive was to find a remedy where the minimum amount of construction could be completed yet “still serve the essential purpose for which the drive was conceived.”\footnote{Minutes from Meeting,} March 1947. Considerations were given to the aspects of Fort Drive that could be omitted and still allow for “some semblance of a circumferential traffic facility.”\footnote{T.C. Jeffers, “The Fort Drive Express Parkway,” as found in Appendix C “Minutes from Meeting,” June 1947.} Ways in which design in the curvature of the roadways could be cut, use of already constructed streets adopted and landscaped details delayed until more funds were available. This proposal could be considered the opposite of what Charles Eliot had envisioned, disregarding his warning
against piecemeal construction.\textsuperscript{182} Thus, the recommendation that “the Drive could be built in sections as the need arises” was the new philosophy adopted by the Commission.\textsuperscript{183} Section-by-section the plan suggested alterations that distanced Fort Drive from its intended purpose. As a result, the Fort Drive was renamed Fort Drive Express Parkway.\textsuperscript{184}

The NCPPC’s meetings became less and less tied up with reports on land acquisition for Fort Drive. As a result, and in combination of other emerging pertinent projects and continued lack of funding, the Commission began relying on condemnation.\textsuperscript{185} In “Park Planning and the Acquisition of Open Spaces: A Cast Study,” published by \textit{The University of Chicago Law Review}, five possible techniques for park land acquisition are presented; they include purchase, transfer, condemnation, donation, and subdivision dedication.\textsuperscript{186} As a direct result of the desperation spurred by the Fowler-Dent Report and the demands of incorporating Fort Drive into the modern highway plan for the city— while the city was developing faster than the land could be acquired— condemnation was wrongly assumed to be the cheapest and fastest way to complete the project. The technique, however, back fired as the condemnation proceedings caused

\textsuperscript{182} Eliot, having stated in an interview in March 1928, that “the commission has not felt that it could go into extensive purchases for that drive without some assurance of the whole thing going through, because to buy a little piece here and a little piece there would never amount to anything.” \textsc{National Capital Park and Planning Commission, “Minutes from Meeting.”} Washington, D.C.: September 1928, 23–25.


\textsuperscript{184} Jeffers, “Fort Drive Express Parkway,” 8. The role of Fort Drive Express Parkway was to have “an important function as a distributing facility for traffic entering and leaving the District on the 27 radial highways, exclusive of the bridge crossing from Virginia.”

\textsuperscript{185} “Suits Started To Obtain Land For Fort Drive: Condemnation Move Involved Property in Northeast Section,” \textit{Washington Post}, July 19, 1938.

\textsuperscript{186} “Park Planning and the Acquisition of Open Spaces: A Case Study.” \textit{The University of Chicago Law Review} (1969), 643.
delays, spiked costs, and brought negative press to the project and the Commission. An additional avenue for further research would involve a closer look at the NCPPC’s condemnation records to see if any patterns can be identified. The practice of condemning lands was used throughout the Fort Drive project and the trend appears to have targeted African Americans east of downtown where land values were cheaper.\textsuperscript{187} Therefore, by 1947 Fort Drive was losing its luster, the Commission was abandoning its original vision, and ultimately the ‘Golden Age’ of Fort Drive came to an end.\textsuperscript{188}

\textsuperscript{187} Examples provided: Minutes from the June meeting 1936, “[18\textsuperscript{th} & Irving Streets, S.E. to Nichols Ave] Negro who owns it has lived there 18 years … oral offer now submitted at $1,500, which is $500 less than owner felt reasonable.” Minutes from September 1936 “[Lot 167, Sq. 5744]… 68 year old negro and his invalid wife have been awaiting our proposal.” Minutes from the October meeting 1938, “condemnation to be authorized at the time on all unacquired items in this project now scheduled for acquisition.” Minutes from April meeting 1947, “Section J, vicinity of Minnesota Ave. & Hayes St., N.E. and 4100 Block Cault Place, N.E. acquired by condemnation.” Minutes from the December meeting 1938, “there are eight colored heirs involved. A negro lawyer has apparently done excellent work in getting this offer signed.”

\textsuperscript{188} The condemnation of properties in the midst of a serious housing shortage caused by growth in the city during the war created embarrassing media coverage for the NCPPC.” Shaheen, 11.
Chapter 5
Fort Drive: 1950s, 1960s, 1970s

The prosperous 1950s brought with it, in regards to parkway design, urban plans on a massive scale. Roadways became “removed from the hands of landscape architects and placed under control of highway engineers and urban planners, who were guided by economic concerns, rather than aesthetic and recreational values.” World War II stunted the progress of Fort Drive and with a renewed sense of freedom and hope for a promising future—the population was rapidly increasing around the Nation’s Capital. No longer could the government feasibly use curvy parkways—which were once seen as the ideal marriage between recreation, conservation and transportation—as responsible ways to move large amounts of traffic in a safe and efficient fashion. Instead, expressways and freeways that allowed increased speeds and direct routes provided answers to the new challenges of the mid-twentieth century.

President Harry S Truman wrote to the Chairman of NCPPC, requesting that efforts be focused in 1950 on making D.C., “the best planned city in the world.” As a result, the first Comprehensive Plan entitled “Washington – Present and Future” was written to show NCPPC’s “work on the plan of Washington over the past 25 years.” Presented in six monographs, the documents addressed issues from open space to public schools. The first issue addressed, and arguably the most pressing, was the problem of

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traffic congestion. In order to address the perpetual traffic problem, the NCPPC proposed
that the City adopt a regional thoroughfare plan. Regional in the sense that Washington,
D.C.’s metropolitan area extended far from its boundary lines, making simple suggestions
for alterations to existing roads no longer a solution.

Incorporated in this grand plan for the greater Washington Metropolitan Area was
a network of both circumferential and radial roadway systems, “designed to function in
combination and serve all major movements of traffic.”\textsuperscript{193} The network involved the use
of three circumferential highways: an inner ring, intermediate ring and outer ring. Of the
“ring routes” Fort Drive was to serve as the intermediate ring.\textsuperscript{194} These early beltways not
only aided the current need to relieve traffic, but were also a precedent for the current
beltway system, because they were predicted to provide service “in the future when
employment is more widely distributed and when a larger city is spread over a far greater
land area.”\textsuperscript{195}

\textsuperscript{193} “1950 Comprehensive Plan,” Monograph No. 1, 29.
\textsuperscript{194} “1950 Comprehensive Plan,” Monograph No.5, 22.
\textsuperscript{195} “1950 Comprehensive Plan,” Monograph No. 1, 29.
Figure 5.1

Fort Drive highlighted in yellow. Map from National Capital Planning Commission’s archives.
Specifically, the inner ring was to be just one mile from the White House, “to carry traffic around the central area.” The intermediate route was to be located five miles from the White House and “would be developed as a freeway or express parkway… within the District…[and] would follow the right-of-way proposed for Fort Drive.” Lastly, the outer ring “would entirely be located beyond the District of Columbia,” and serve as a bypass option to avoid the city’s downtown traffic. Many in Washington, D.C., who are familiar with this beltway plan are thankful it was never enacted, as the city would have soon outgrown the plan by the time construction finished. The Capital Beltway as built today is sixty-four miles long and approximately ten miles from downtown. Although Fort Drive serving as a freeway may have resulted in traffic disaster, and compromised the integrity of the Civil War forts, the important aspect to emphasize in the 1950 plan is that Fort Drive was again proposed as a contributing feature. Fort Drive was versatile enough to survive in modern roadway discussions after experiencing delays decade after decade.

Throughout the report, the terms intermediate ring and Fort Drive are used interchangeably—when no specific name is given to either the inner ring or outer ring. Signifying the familiarity the Commission and the Government had at this time with Fort Drive. Interesting to note is the lack of regard towards the Civil War forts. Throughout the different phases of Fort Drive, the parkway always coincided with discussion for the preservation of the Civil War forts. By 1950, Fort Drive was of higher importance than

the forts’ preservation. Fort Drive by 1950 was to carry “not only automobile and truck traffic but transit vehicles as well” and serve as a substantial traffic artery for the Nation’s Capital.\footnote{199 “1950 Comprehensive Plan,” Monograph No.6, 30.} The ease, with which Fort Drive transitioned into the government’s modern expressway, represents a momentous point in Fort Drive’s history. By 1950, the project completely shed its remnants of an early 20\textsuperscript{th} century continuous scenic drive, never to be suggested again.

Serving as the radial features in this thoroughfare plan were GWMP, Baltimore-Washington Parkway, and Suitland Parkway. The thoroughfare network as seen in the map “Proposed Regional Thoroughfare Plan” designated Fort Drive and these National Register listed parkways as “express highway[s].”\footnote{200 There is no mention of Rock Creek Parkway on this map.} This shared use of Fort Drive with the other National Capital Region’s parkways validates, yet again, Fort Drive’s perpetual presence and mention alongside the significant group. Fort Drive and the “Parkways of the National Capital Region” served a joint role in the proposed network of expressways in the 1950s.

Another reason for the transition away from recreational and scenic drives in the 1950s to freeways was a result of the loss of public sentiment toward commemoration. Timothy Davis argues in “Changing Conception of an American Commemorative Landscape,” that quality parkways lost their luster, as “no major commemorative pressure [weighed on the] shoulders”— of politicians, giving “little incentive to continue funding” such expensive projects.\footnote{201 Davis, “Changing Conceptions,” 139.} The sentiment which was felt nationwide at the time
of the formation of the Senate Park Commission, which inspired suggestions for the preservation and linkage of as many Civil War forts which could be acquired, was far removed in the booming metropolis of mid-twentieth century D.C.

Although acquisition of land for Fort Drive sparsely continued throughout the 1950s, it did continue. And, the project gained a renewed sense with the Civil War centennial. A recycled desire to honor the memory of the Civil War resurfaced efforts to preserve the forts and propose a new plan for Fort Drive.

**Fort Drive System**

Fort Drive and the accompanying Union forts were again reevaluated in the years approaching the centennial anniversary of the Civil War. A *Washington Post* article “Fort Drive Sought for Centennial,” reported that the Civil War Centennial Commission “urged the District Commissioners to move ahead on the projected Fort Drive network.”202 The hiring of the urban planning consultant firm, Fred W. Tuemmler and Associates gave the old concept a new name, the Fort Park System. Presented in the most thorough and detailed report to-date, the “Fort Park System, A Re-evaluation Study of Fort Drive, Washington D.C.,” provided the NCPC with condition assessments on each fort and surrounding parkland. Presented on April 23, 1965, the report separates itself from previous studies by suggesting, “Fort Drive be reconstituted as essentially a recreation

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By 1965, the proposal to make Fort Drive an expressway had outgrown the need.

Phase six of Fort Drive could not serve as an artery to the grand thoroughfare scheme or return the project to its original potential as a formal parkway. Instead Tuemmler focused his report on Fort Drive the “crown feature” of the Nation’s park system. By 1965, 1,276 acres of parkland had been acquired in the District to construct “connecting links and fort areas.” And, the majority of the land had been in continuous use as a park for over fifty years, making it a cultural landscape.

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203 Tuemmler, 18.
204 Tuemmler, vi & 35.
### Figure 5.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status of Park Land Assembly and Areas Proposed for Acquisition or Disposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>** Existing Holdings **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battery Kemble Park (Canal Road – Foxhall Road)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska Avenue (Foxhall Road – Tenley Circle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Reno Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Reno Park to Fort DeRussy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort DeRussy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Fort DeRussy to Fort Stevens Park: Located in Rock Creek Park
- Fort Stevens Park: 5.8
- Fort Slocum Park: 2.6
- Fort Stevens Park to Fort Slocum Park: 10.7
- Fort Slocum Park: 20.0
- Fort Slocum Park to Fort Totten Park: 33.4
- Fort Totten Park: 40.1
- Fort Totten Park to Barnard Hill Park: 47.3
- Barnard Hill Park: 31.4
- Janard Hill Park to National Training School: 10.2
- National Training School: 69.7
- National Training School to Fort Mahon Park: 45.2
- Fort Mahon Park: 39.3
- Fort Mahon Park to Fort Chaplin Park: 11.3
- Fort Chaplin Park: 53.0
- Fort Chaplin Park to Fort Dupont Park: 16.2
- Fort Dupont Park: 368.6
- Fort Dupont Park to Fort Stanton Park: 113.9
- Fort Stanton Park: 81.3
- Fort Stanton Park to St. Elizabeth's Hospital: 50.6
- St. Elizabeth's Hospital to Fort Carroll Park: 89.0
- Fort Carroll Park to Fort Greble Park: 38.0
- Fort Greble Park: 36.9
- Fort Greble Park to Oxon Run Park: 5.9

| Totals | 1,276.0 | 139.4 | 15.7 | 42.1 | 197.2 | 38.0 | 1,435.2 |

The net increase in park land of 159.2 acres represents a 12.5 per cent increase in the Fort Park System. The 1,276 acres of existing Fort Park System land is 16.5 per cent of the total park land in Washington, D.C. The proposed net increase in Fort Park System land to 1,435.2 acres would represent 18.2 per cent of the new total of park land in Washington, D.C.
Tuemmler’s recommendations did not propose the abandonment of Fort Drive, he just suggested forsaking the idea of a continuous drive. He wrote that, “although in most of its connecting elements, internal circulation is restricted to pedestrian cycling, the section east of the Anacostia River appears to be reasonable location for vehicular road.”\(^\text{205}\) In Tuemmler’s vision, Fort Drive as a road was possible, just east of the Anacostia River where traditionally land values were less expensive.

Tuemmler’s report gave consideration to new ideas for creating a continuous park to celebrate both the centennial of the Civil War and the long-term commitment of the NCPC to endorse Fort Drive. In his words, the goal was to develop a “permanent contributor to the beauty and amenity of the Washington environment, in its historic implications, befitting the great capital of a great nation.”\(^\text{206}\) These new modes were walking, hiking and biking connections—since the greenbelt landscape existed, construction of pedestrian trails was feasible. Therefore, approximately twenty-nine miles of trails were proposed to link the forts, of which eight miles were to be designated “Hiking and Cycling” connections.\(^\text{207}\) Today, one can bike approximately eight miles of trails between the forts on the Anacostia side found in National Capital Parks-East, which is the only remnant of the continuous link.\(^\text{208}\) Interestingly, the biker trail most closely

\(^{205}\) Tuemmler, 25.
\(^{206}\) Tuemmler, 37.
\(^{207}\) Tuemmler, 24.
resembles the Senate Park Commission’s linking, using the same recommended sites Mahan, Chaplin, Dupont, Davis, Stanton and Ricketts.\textsuperscript{209} 

\textsuperscript{209} Unfortunately, the trail is presently poorly managed.
Figure 5.3

Tuemmler’s report reinstated Fort Drive’s “important historic and recreational asset” within both “national and local significance.”\textsuperscript{210} Tuemmler wrote, “the view of Fort Drive has become a distorted one… It is necessary now to consider the Fort Drive problem in its totality… so that both highway and park factors can be viewed with equal clarity and given equal weight.”\textsuperscript{211} Again, evidence in this Report signifies the historic balance in the relationship between Fort Drive as a road and as a park housing Civil War defenses. By 1965, the "evaluation of the Fort Drive system reveals a hybrid: part highway in active use, part park in active use, part park unexplored, undeveloped and unused, and part forts, mostly overgrown and neglected, and far from the interesting and inspiring relics of our history.”\textsuperscript{212}

As a solution to the problem of Fort Drive and as a possible answer to the neglect of the earthworks, the 1965 report included the use of only fifteen sites. Tuemmler’s Fort Park System included Battery Kemble, Fort Reno, Fort De Russy, Fort Stevens, Fort Slocum, Fort Totten, Fort Lincoln, Fort Mahan, Fort Chaplin, Fort Dupont, Fort Davis, Fort Stanton, Battery Ricketts, Fort Carroll and Fort Greble.\textsuperscript{213} Tuemmler’s proposal represented an attempt to see the project as a cultural landscape.

Tuemmler’s hybrid proposal could have been realistically executed in 1965. However, by the 1970s the vision of a unified Fort Park System was blurred, and the history of Fort Drive was all but forgotten. Although, Tuemmler’s report reiterated what

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{210} Tuemmler, 9.
  \item \textsuperscript{211} Tuemmler, 9.
  \item \textsuperscript{212} Tuemmler, 16.
  \item \textsuperscript{213} The forts missing from this list that are NPS sites are Fort Bayard and Fort Bunker Hill.
\end{itemize}
many said before him—that the forts only served as “accents within the recreational framework of the system”—the 1970s brought efforts only to preserve the forts.\textsuperscript{214} The idea of Fort Drive as a cultural landscape was suspended by the limited notion of it only serving as a connection.

**Fort Circle Parks**

By the 1970s the notion of Fort Drive apparently got lost in the discussion of the ring of forts and open space. In an “Interpretive Prospectus” plan recommended by John W. Bright, Chief at the Office of Environmental Planning and Design, no mention of Fort Drive was made and seemingly the new name Fort Circle Parks was already adopted.\textsuperscript{215} It is important to note, however, that although the Report does not mention Fort Drive, it borrowed Fort Drive’s specifications, establishing Fort Circle Parks as only the Civil War forts within the District line. Fort Circle Parks is, therefore, significant in the timeline of Fort Drive, as it marks the point when Fort Drive was left unmentioned in a proposal. Whether purposeful or unintentional, the absence of Fort Drive is puzzling as so many efforts by NCPC stressed Fort Drive’s significance in the survival of the Civil War forts. Unfortunately, as a result of the 1970s the Civil War forts were listed on the National Register without inclusion of the landscapes which surround them.

\textsuperscript{214} Tuemmler, 37.
Figure 5.4

Present day Fort Circle Park signage. Picture taken by K. Finnigan
Chapter 6  
Civil War Forts and their National Register Nominations

After the establishment of Fort Circle Parks, the 1970s nomination forms for the inclusion of the Civil War forts onto the National Register left no mention of Fort Drive. The first National Register of Historic Places Nomination resulted in the district listing of these forts on July 15, 1974, under the name “Civil War Fort Sites (Defenses of Washington).” The brief five-paged form includes seventeen fort sites: Battery Kemble, Fort Bayard, Fort Reno, Fort De Russy, Fort Stevens, Fort Slocum, Fort Totten, Fort Bunker Hill, Fort Lincoln, Fort Mahan, Fort Chaplin, Fort Dupont, Fort Davis, Battery Ricketts, Fort Stanton, Fort Carroll, and Fort Greble. Interestingly, these seventeen fort sites were all at one time or another involved in the plans for Fort Drive. According to the nomination the “sites are on federal park land totaling some 1,300 acres.”216 Of these 1,300 acres, Fred W. Tuemmler’s 1965 report states that 1,276 acres of the 1,300 were acquired for the “connecting links and fort areas.” However, the Fort Drive park system, which the forts can attribute their preservation, goes unmentioned. Fort Drive and the “almost continuous twenty-three mile green belt of public land administered by the National Park Service” was left out.217 This exclusion was in spite of the fact that the Joint Committee on Landmarks in Washington, D.C., amended the Civil War forts  

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landmark designation on June 19, 1973, to include “the Civil War Fort Sites and the Fort Circle Park System.”

The bibliographical references used to support the nomination of these forts are documents solely pertain to Civil War significance. Thus, the date of significance on the 1974 listing was 1861-1865. Implying that the only history worthy of significance is Civil War history—even though the SPC’s original wording in The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia (1902) stated that “the views from these points are impressive in proportion to their commanding military positions, and they are well worth acquirement as future local parks, in addition to any claim their historical or military interest may afford.”

Three years later, the nomination was considered insufficient—and a revision entitled “(Defenses of Washington) (Civil War) Fort Sites” was drafted. The new 1977 nomination increased the number of fortifications by two and redefined “Fort Reno and Fort Slocum as sites only with no historic remains.” The boundary increase was not for the surrounding landscapes, but for Fort Marcy in Virginia and Fort Foote in Maryland, forts which were not included in the Fort Drive project.

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220 Senate Park Commission, 111.
Importantly, the properties proposed for the National Register only include the sites under jurisdiction of the National Park Service. Never has there been an attempt to draft an all-inclusive united nomination to include other Civil War forts like Fort Willard or Fort Ward in Virginia. Also, Fort Lincoln is not associated with the National Park Service yet remains on the National Register. Significantly, however, Fort Lincoln was perpetually included in all phases of Fort Drive.

The revised nomination again resulted in only the forts, not the park landscapes, being included onto the National Register—thus protecting only 130 acres and leaving approximately 1,000 acres vulnerable to urban threats. The exclusions of the park lands are made quite visible with examination of the 1977 nomination form—as small boxes and triangles are drawn around the forts to distinguish the listed property.
Creating and supporting two National Register nominations that only protected the earthworks was a major oversight by the National Park Service. Letters dating to as early as 1979 urge the National Capital Region to reconsider the landscapes’ National Register eligibility. The establishment of the parkland and thus the preservation of the forts as historic sites were a direct result of continuous Fort Drive proposals and
reflection of 20th century urban planning—more so than any effort toward Civil War commemoration. Although the forts tell an important chapter in both local and national history, the entire greenbelt landscape that exists today illustrates the history of development in Washington, D.C.

The need to revise the National Register nomination form has come up in current discussion surrounding the sesquicentennial of the Civil War. The National Park Service should address the urban threats encroaching on the landscapes surrounding the forts. Although this thesis provides evidence that Fort Drive is worthy of designation as a National Register District, concerns for its mere association with the Civil War Defenses of Washington’s National Register nomination should be raised. Not only would use of the history of Fort Drive to state the landscapes’ significance exclude Forts Marcy and Foote, but most importantly Fort Drive’s history and legacy is not limited to its Civil War past.
CONCLUSION

Approximately 14 percent of parkland in Washington, D.C., can be directly linked to Fort Drive and the majority of that parkland remains excluded from the National Register. With the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, the National Park Service is again returning to the notion of commemoration, as was the case in the 1890s and 1960s. Now is an opportune time to place the ring of parkland on the National Register. Whether the National Park Service determines to list Fort Drive individually, as part of the “Parkways of the National Capital Region,” or under the Civil War Defenses of Washington, the purpose of this analysis was not to draft the National Register nomination, but to review Fort Drive’s eligibility and define if and how Fort Drive was significant within Washington, D.C.’s park system. There is a possibility that the National Park Service may never nominate the landscapes to the National Register as a result of the cumbersome task of involving multiple jurisdictions. If this effort is not continued, at the very least it can be resoundingly claimed that the fort landscapes are fulfilling their intended purpose as parkland, serving both the local and national community.

Fort Drive was seen through the eyes of its earliest planners as a network of parks, a role much more substantial than a parkway. The topography of these landscapes, which provided strategic advantages in the City’s defense, has been a continuous managed

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222 “Fort Park System presently encompasses approximately 1,276 acres, or about 16 ½ per cent of total park land in City of Washington.” Tuemmler, vi.

223 The revision of the 1977 National Register nomination to include the Fort Drive Park System will require the Virginia State Historic Preservation Office, District of Columbia’s Historic Preservation Office, Maryland State Historic Preservation Office and three park departments of the National Capital Region.
feature of the city, demanding a period of significance much more inclusive than 1861–1865. Placing the fort landscapes on the National Register would be appropriate to insure that the greenbelt of the District and the picturesque vistas it provides of the city survive for the enjoyment of future generations. Fort Drive meets the National Register’s definition for a district, being “a geographically definable area, urban or rural, possessing a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united by past events or aesthetically by plan.” If the National Park Service wants to accurately portray the landscapes’ cultural significance, then Fort Drive should be listed on the National Register along with the “Parkways of the National Capital Region.” Fort Drive meets eligibility for the National Register under criteria A for its “association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history,” under criteria C because it embodies “distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction.” and under criteria D with archaeology potential “that may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.”

At present an exhibit in the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C. entitled “Washington: Symbol and City” asks the question “What to do about Fort Circle Parks?” The first action taken should be to understand the designed landscapes’ cultural history. A cultural landscape involves man on the land over time, an evolution that can be expressed by the change in the subject’s name: Fort Drive, Fort Drive Express Parkway, Intermediate Ring, Fort Circle Parks, and the Civil War Defenses of

Washington. As the name and the community’s relationship have evolved, the land remained the same. The second action should be to place the landscapes on the National Register for Historic Places. Unique to all the other parkways in the National Capital Region, the landscapes of Fort Drive remain as they were when they were desired by the Senate Park Commission and National Capital Park and Planning Commission/National Capital Planning Commission. Massive disruption involved in the demolition, clearing, dredging, and grading required for parkway construction did not violate Fort Drive’s parklands. As a result, one can visit a site like Fort Stanton, stand on the same high ground covered in woods, interpret the early planners’ intent, and get a historical, scenic, and cultural prospective. Or visit Fort Dupont and Fort Chaplin and experience rare plant communities for an urban park such as Pink Ladyslipper Orchids, Mountain Laurel or Pinxter Azaleas.

As was reported to the National Capital Planning Commission in 1965, by Fred Tuemmler,

The citizens of Washington and, indeed, the nation, are indebted to those early planners who were endowed with sufficient insight and imagination to realize that this green strip, arranged circumferentially on the rim of hills overlooking the low and relatively flat center of the Nation’s Capital …. would not only provide wonderful opportunities for viewing this panorama of urban sculpture but, through the memorialization of the historic forts, would relate the outer areas of the city to the inner core.\(^\text{226}\)

Ultimately, Fort Drive should no longer be viewed as an “unrealized” parkway connecting the ring of forts, because it provides a ring of living green space today. Just as

\(^{226}\) Tuemmler, 20.
easily as one can argue that Fort Drive would not have existed without the 
memorialization trend in the 1890s, one can refute that, if not for Fort Drive, the 
preserved condition of the Civil War Defenses of Washington would not be the reality 
they are today. However, Fort Drive was not about the Civil War, it was about creating 
parklands with Civil War relics. As a result, the initiative greatly shaped the planning for 
the Nation’s Capital, thus making it more than sufficiently eligible for the National 
Register.
Appendices
Appendix A
Repeat Photography

The following appendix includes screen captures from the 1932 film, *A Future Park System for Washington and its Environ* and images taken by the author in the summer of 2011. Using the method of repeat photography, the effort was made to reveal the existing viewsheds in juxtaposition to the parklands that were valued by the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, as well as highlight their intact integrity.
Figure A.1


Figure A.2

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Foote 2011.
Figure A.3


Figure A.4

Figure A.5


Figure A.6

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Lincoln 2011.
Figure A.7


Figure A.8

First (taller) wall missing.
Figure A.9


Figure A.10

Appendix B
Present Condition of Fort Drive’s Parklands

The following appendix includes images of sixteen of the eighteen Civil War Defenses of Washington’s National Parks (Fort Marcy and Fort Foote are excluded since they were not part of Fort Drive). These pictures display the present condition of these National Parks in Washington, D.C., highlighting manicured and unmanicured greenspace, rare plant life, and urban threats.
Figure B.1

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Battery Kemble.

Figure B.2

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Battery Kemble (B).
Figure B.3

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Bayard.

Figure B.4

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Bayard (B).
Figure B.5

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Reno.

Figure B.6

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Reno (B).
Figure B.7

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort DeRussy.

Figure B.8

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort DeRussy (B).
Figure B.9

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Stevens (Restored).

Figure B.10

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Slocum.
Figure B.11

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Slocum (B).

Figure B.12

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Totten.
Figure B.13

Picture taken by K. Finnigan Fort Totten (B).

Figure B.14

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Bunker Hill.
Figure B.15

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Bunker Hill.

Figure B.16

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Mahan.
Figure B.17

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Mahan (B).

Figure B.18

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Chaplin.
Figure B.19

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Chaplin (B).
Figure B.20

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Chaplin (C).

Figure B.21

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Chaplin (D).
Figure B.22


Figure B.23

Figure B.24

Picture provided by J. Rosenstock. Mountain Laurel. Forts Chaplin & Mahan (B).

Figure B.25

Figure B.26

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Dupont.

Figure B.27

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Dupont (B).
Figure B.28

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Dupont (C).

Figure B.29

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Dupont (D).
Figure B.30

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Dupont (E).

Figure B.31

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Dupont (F).
Figure B.32

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Davis.

Figure B.33

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Davis (B).
Figure B.34

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Davis (C).

Figure B.35

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Davis (D).
Figure B.36

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Davis (E).

Figure B.37

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Battery Ricketts and Fort Stanton (F).
Figure B.38

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Stanton.

Figure B.39

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Stanton (B).
Figure B.40

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Carroll.

Figure B.41

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Carroll (B).
Figure B.42

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Greble.

Figure B.43

Picture taken by K. Finnigan. Fort Greble (B).
References


“Park Body Acquires Evans Estate Land: 13 Acres Are Obtained as Link in Fort Drive Project for District.” *Washington Post*, June 20, 1931.


