



# DC STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY FORM

## PROPERTY INFORMATION

Property Name(s): Reservations 105 and 378

Street Address(es): Virginia Avenue between 19th and 21st Streets NW

Square(s) and Lot(s): Square E 87, Lots 807, 808, 809, 810, and 811

Property Owner(s): United States Government

The property/properties is/are being evaluated for potential historical significance as/for:

- An individual building or structure.
- A contributing element of a historic district: Specify
- A possible expansion of a historic district: Specify
- A previously unevaluated historic district to be known as: Specify
- An archaeological resource with site number(s): Specify
- An object (e.g. statue, stone marker etc.): Specify
- A new multiple property/thematic study regarding: Specify
- Association with a multiple property/thematic study: Specify
- Other: Individual Site



*Figure 1: View across the property showing plantings of grasses and perennials (Roger Foley on behalf of Oehme, van Sweden).*



(prepared 1998 but not listed). These secondary sources were augmented by the primary sources in the National Park Service site files for Reservations 105 and 378, and by various other photographs, maps, and newspaper articles. Context for the Oehme, van Sweden design of Reservation 378 was developed from the interviews and writings of Wolfgang Oehme and James van Sweden, professional landscape architecture and gardening literature, and supplemental primary and secondary sources. Due to research institution closures as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, research was primarily conducted through online sources and databases, and documents provided electronically to the preparers.

Reservations 105 and 378 are contributing elements of the L'Enfant Plan of the City of Washington, DC, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1997. A draft National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Northwest Rectangle (prepared in 1997 but not listed) evaluated the entire Northwest Rectangle as an eligible historic district and identified the Discus Thrower statue in Reservation 105 as a contributing resource. Reservations 105 and 378 were also evaluated for additional contexts and significance in the 2019 Cultural Landscapes Inventory for Virginia Avenue NW and determined eligible for their association with post-World War II redevelopment of Virginia Avenue and as local expressions of Modernist landscape design (see the Significance and Evaluation section, below, for full details of these listings including criteria, levels of significance, and periods of significance). The primary purpose of this Determination of Eligibility is to evaluate the designed landscape of Reservations 105 and 378, in particular the development of the landscape in 1977-78 by the landscape architecture partnership of Oehme, van Sweden.

For the purposes of this Determination of Eligibility, a cultural landscape methodology was applied to describe the property, identify its character-defining features, and evaluate its integrity. This approach is based on federal guidance for evaluating historic resources consisting of or containing significant landscape elements, including *National Register Bulletin 30: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes*, *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*, *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques*, and other pertinent documents.<sup>1</sup> This approach is used because the tangible and intangible aspects of the landscape individually and collectively create historic character and aid in the understanding of its historic and cultural importance.

## DESCRIPTION

### *Introduction*

The property is a 2.89-acre site located in the northwest quadrant of Washington, DC, encompassing Reservations 105 and 378. It is bounded by Virginia Avenue NW to the north/east, C Street NW and the Federal Reserve Board's William McChesney Martin, Jr.

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Flint McClelland, J. Timothy Keller, Genevieve P. Keller, Robert Z. Melnick, *National Register Bulletin 30: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1989, revised 1999); Robert R. Page, Cathy A. Gilbert, and Susan A. Dolan, *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1998), and Charles A. Birnbaum and Christine Capella Peters, *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996), 3-5.

Building (Martin Building) to the south, and 21st Street NW to the west. The site was built over underground parking garages (north garage and east garage) as part of the construction of the Martin Building between 1971 and 1974. Reservation 105, also known as Edward J. Kelly Park and named for the superintendent of National Capital Parks in 1959, is 0.63 acres and comprises the northwest corner of the site. The remaining 2.26 acres of the property is Reservation 378, which is north and east of the Martin Building. At the southeast corner of the site is a plaza and fountain dedicated to Robert Latham Owen, a senator involved in the establishment of the Federal Reserve Act. Landscape architect George E. Patton created the original design for the site in 1971, but harsh weather in 1976–1977 killed many of his evergreen plantings, necessitating a redesign. David Lilly, a Governor of the Federal Reserve, hired James van Sweden and Wolfgang Oehme, of Oehme, van Sweden, to design the renovation in 1977 in what became known as the New American Garden style.<sup>2</sup>

## *Description*

### **Topography/Spatial Organization**

The property is a triangular shaped space created by the diagonal of Virginia Avenue crossing the orthogonal grid of Washington’s north-south and east-west streets, as established by the L’Enfant plan of 1791–1792. The site is surrounded by C Street and 21st Street on the south and west and is spatially separated from the roads by street trees, raised granite planting beds, and raised earthen berms.

To organize the description of the landscape, within the property five different zones are identified (Figure 3). The divisions between zones relate to land cover and use. Each zone has unique features that distinguishes it from other areas. The five zones include 1) Edward J. Kelly Park; 2) Tennis Court; 3) Central Lawn; 4) Martin Building Front; and 5) Robert Latham Owen Park.

Edward J. Kelly Park is located at the northwest corner of the property and includes a lawn, the discobolos sculpture, and the majority of Reservation 105. The tennis court area includes the court, fencing, and surrounding sidewalks. The Central lawn includes the lawn, earthen berms that surround the lawn, and walkways between the sidewalk and building. The Martin Building Front is a rectangular-shaped area that is immediately adjacent to the building, follows its linear form, and includes walls and structures that provide access to the garage and the building. Robert Latham Owen Park includes a large oval fountain surrounded by massive granite planting beds.

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<sup>2</sup> “Federal Reserve Board Garden,” Federal Reserve Board Garden | The Cultural Landscape Foundation, accessed May 27, 2020, <https://www.tclf.org/landscapes/federal-reserve-board-garden?destination=search-results>

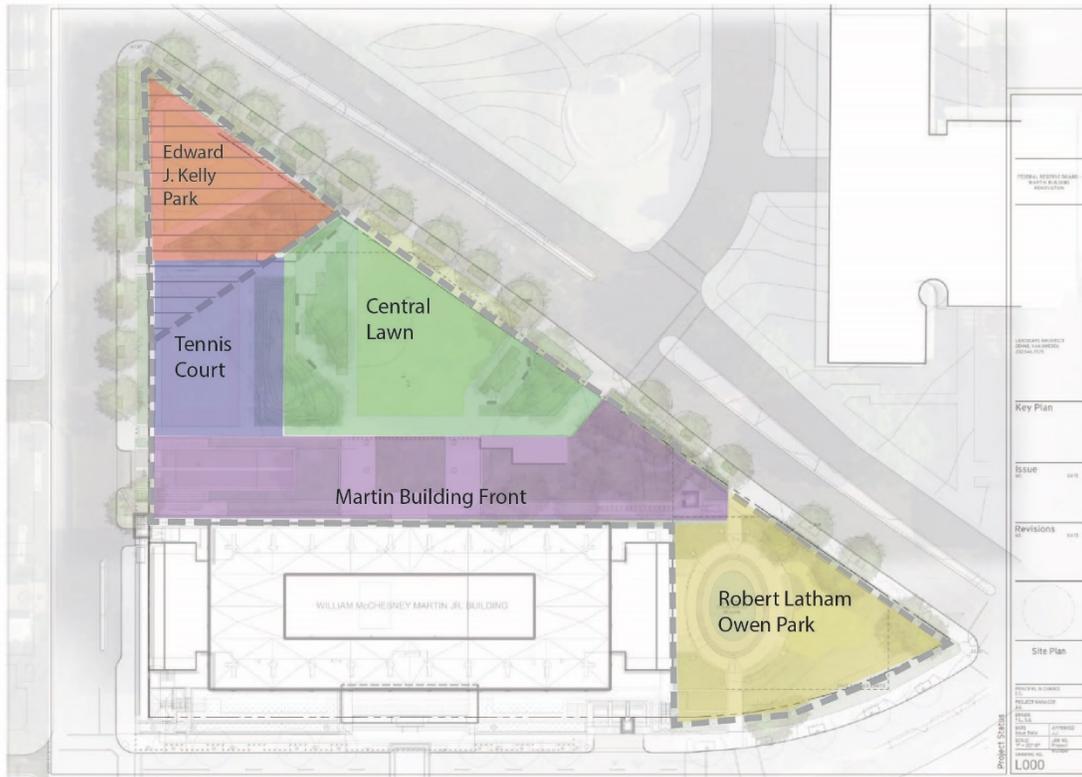


Figure 3: Plan illustrating the five zones that spatially organize the landscape.

Landscape architect George Patton established the fundamentals of the landscape’s spatial organization in 1971, with a tennis court on the west, large oval fountain on the east (Robert Latham Owen Park), and a central lawn. The fountain creates a focal point at the east side of the site and is set within a terraced plaza and granite planting beds with built-in seating that separates this area from the rest of the site. The tennis court anchors the west side of the site and is sunken below the adjacent grade (Figure 4). The granite beds, as designed by Patton, are extant and continue to frame the fountain, tennis court, Martin Building Front and underground entrance to the north garage.

Other elements of spatial organization were added by landscape architects Oehme, van Sweden in 1977-78. The Central Lawn is divided into individual, asymmetrical areas defined by a series of earthen berms. The design intent was to enclose and frame niches that were distinct from the open Central Lawn, Tennis Court, and Robert Latham Owen Park. The earthen berms are planted with shade trees, groundcovers, ornamental grasses, and perennials. Shaded seating areas form small niches in contrast to the open lawn and raised planting beds frame walkways and surround the tennis court, fountain, and north garage parking entrance.



*Figure 4: Tennis court and Martin Building, looking southeast (Shalom Baranes Associates).*

## **Circulation**

Concrete exposed aggregate walks provide circulation throughout the site, while plain concrete sidewalks form the perimeter between the site and the streets. The system of walks is generally orthogonal; one concrete aggregate walk surrounds the sunken tennis court and provides access to 21st Street via a set of steps. Another walk forms the perimeter of the central lawn, and a third connects surrounding sidewalks from the north and south to the fountain. The pattern of walks within the site are original to Patton's design.<sup>3</sup> Oehme, van Sweden modified Patton's design by creating two secondary circulation routes that lead to seating areas off the central lawn. These walks diverge from the orthogonal pattern and introduce a more meandering movement across the landscape, encouraging people to sit and linger in the park.

Vehicular access includes a ramped entrance and exit to the underground north garage, located northwest of the Martin Building.

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<sup>3</sup> Shannon Garrison, University of Pennsylvania, "Virginia Avenue NW Cultural Landscape Inventory," National Park Service: National Mall and Memorial Parks, February 2019, 99.

## Views

Prominent views along Virginia Avenue present a streetscape of trees and parklets lining the avenue. The Martin Building is visually dominant from the fountain and the central lawn (Figure 5). Other views toward park features include the view of the fountain from the terraced plaza, views to the seating areas and from the central lawn, and views to the rotating sculpture exhibits within the central lawn. Views into the site from Virginia Avenue include the views to the statue exhibits and Discus Thrower (Discobolos), and to the mass plantings, especially when in bloom seasonally.



Figure 5: View across the park to the Martin Building (Roger Foley on behalf of Oehme, van Sweden).

## Vegetation

Vegetation on the property includes trees, shrubs, perennials, ornamental grasses, and lawn. Large street trees line Virginia Avenue. Several southern magnolia trees (*Magnolia grandiflora*) are north of the Martin Building, planted in a line running east and west. These trees likely date from George Patton's original design and may be the only remaining vegetation from his specified plantings.

Most of the existing vegetation dates to Oehme, van Sweden's design. The most notable elements of the planting design are the sweeping masses of flowers and grasses, and the arrangement of shade trees set within groundcovers. As an early example of the New American Garden movement, the earthen berms are planted with groundcovers, ornamental grasses, and shade trees planted in naturalistic patterns. Trees include pagoda trees (*Styphnolobium japonicum*), Amur Corktree (*Phellodendron amurense*), and dogwood (*Cornus kousa*). Groundcovers include Lilyturf (*Liriope muscari*) and English ivy (*Hedra*

*helix*). Grasses and perennials are planted in large swaths that create a tapestry-like appearance. The plants include sedum (*Sedum*), black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia hirta*), plantain lily (*Hosta subcordata grandiflora*), yucca (*Yucca filamentosa*), reedgrass (*Calamagrostis acutiflora stricta*), fountain grass (*Pennisetum setaceum*) and miscanthus (*Miscanthus sinensis*).

Within the raised granite planting beds, vegetation is also planted in masses of the same plant. Shrubs are mostly located within the raised granite planting beds and include boxwoods (*Buxus*), holly (*Ilex*), roses (*Rosa*), and Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*).

These massed planted areas frame the sidewalks along Virginia Avenue and the open space of the Central Lawn, and a small triangular space of lawn at the northwest corner where the discobolos is sited.

### **Buildings and Structures**

There are several utility and security buildings on the property that support the underground garage. An entry kiosk is located north of the Martin Building and provides pedestrian access to the garage. A stair egress/kiosk from the north garage is northeast of the tennis court. A small security building is located at the 21st Street ramp into the garage.

#### *Entrance Kiosk (north of Martin Building)*

The single-story rectangular entrance kiosk north of the Martin Building is accessed by a wide concrete sidewalk (Figure 6). The building was designed by Harbeson, Hough, Livingston, and Larson (H2L2) and built concurrently with the Martin Building and the north garage in 1971-1974. The building has a flat roof with a wide metal parapet. Its concrete foundation creates a base for a continuous panel of bronzed aluminum windows across its north elevation. It is accessed by double-doors on the east end and a single door on the west. A row of magnolia trees separates this building from the Martin Building.



*Figure 6: Entrance kiosk looking southwest.*

*Egress Kiosk (near tennis court)*

A single-story rectangular egress kiosk is north of the tennis court (Figure 7). The building was designed by H2L2 and built concurrently with the Martin Building and the north garage in 1971-1974. It is accessed by a concrete sidewalk on the south side of the building and is built into the topography and earthen berm on its north side. Similar in style to the entrance kiosk, this structure has a high concrete foundation, a flat roof with a wide metal parapet, and a panel of bronzed aluminum windows across the upper third of the north and south elevations. The egress door is a single metal door, located on the building's southeast elevation. The building's foundation is edged with ivy and other low groundcovers.



*Figure 7: Egress kiosk, looking northwest*

### *Security Guard Booth*

A small one-story security building stands at the center of the 21st Street garage ramp south of the tennis court (Figure 8). Similar in style to the entrance and egress kiosks, this building has a concrete foundation, and a flat roof with metal parapet. Windows are on all four elevations, providing a view to oncoming and outgoing vehicular traffic. There is a mail/ticket slot and intercom on the building's west elevation. The kiosk is protected by a single metal bollard and an adjacent gate restricts traffic to the parking garage.



*Figure 8: Security guard booth, looking southeast*

### **Constructed Water Features**

In Robert Latham Owen Park, at the southeast corner of the site, is a granite, domed jetted fountain designed by George Patton in the modernist style (Figure 9).<sup>4</sup> The fountain reflects the modern landscape movement, with clean lines, simple form, and restricted use of materials. Set within an elevated terrace, the fountain visually dominates the eastern half of the park and is surrounded by granite raised beds.

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<sup>4</sup> Garrison, "Virginia Avenue NW Cultural Landscape Inventory," 85.



Figure 9: Fountain in Robert Latham Owen Park (Shalom Baranes Associates).

### Small-Scale Features

There are several small-scale features throughout the site, most dating from Patton’s design, including lamp posts, large granite raised beds, and the tennis court. The lamp posts have black metal bases with disc-shaped clear acrylic shrouds. Adjacent to the fountain, the name of the park, “Robert Latham Owen Park,” is inscribed in the low granite wall immediately in front of the stairs leading from the Martin Building podium to the fountain. The other granite walls vary in height. A granite wall facing the northeast edge of Virginia Avenue was added for security purposes after 2001. It was designed by Oehme, van Sweden to be compatible with the existing landscape.

The Central Lawn provides space for a rotating sculpture display, currently exhibiting figures playing baseball, by sculptor John Dreyfuss. A statue of a discus thrower (discobolos) is sited at the northwest corner of the park. The statue, which was added to the park in 1956, is bronze and set on a granite and marble pillar. The statue is surrounded by a metal security fence. Oehme, van Sweden added benches around the secondary walkways in the 1970s, but these have since been replaced with composite wood benches. There are also two concrete aggregate drinking fountains.<sup>5</sup> Perimeter security includes metal fencing and bulky, square bollards. The vehicular access point to the underground north garage includes gates and retractable barricades integrated into the pavement.

<sup>5</sup> Garrison, “Virginia Avenue NW Cultural Landscape Inventory,” 117.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### *The L'Enfant and McMillan Plans*

Pierre L'Enfant's 1791 plan of Washington, DC, inspired by principles of Baroque city planning, laid out grand radial avenues (named for individual states) to connect the intended sites of prominent public buildings and spaces. A conventional orthogonal grid was imposed over the radial avenues, and the overlapping plans created public spaces ranging from large squares or circles at major intersections to tiny rectangular and triangular plots. Between the planned Capitol Building and an equestrian statue of George Washington directly south of the White House, L'Enfant envisioned a "Grand Avenue" flanked by gardens (the future National Mall). The public spaces were designated as federal reservations. L'Enfant's plan included provisions to divide the land between streets and avenues into blocks and lots, with half of the lots retained by the original landowners and the rest to be retained by the federal government for public buildings or to be sold with the proceeds funding infrastructure, parks, and buildings.<sup>6</sup> The blocks, also called squares, were also numbered.

At the intersection of two of the major radial avenues, Virginia and New York Avenues NW, L'Enfant placed a large rectangular open space that stretched from E Street NW down to the shores of the Potomac River, between 20th and 21st Streets (Figure 9). His plan shows a concave arc at the riverfront with a central feature suggesting a dock or belvedere. When L'Enfant later refused to provide his plan to the government, it was redrawn by Andrew Ellicott, who eliminated a number of L'Enfant's planned open spaces, but retained the rectangle at Virginia and New York Avenues (Figure 11).<sup>7</sup> Ellicott's plan shows a boat basin at the rectangle's riverfront.

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<sup>6</sup> Garrison, "Virginia Avenue NW Cultural Landscape Inventory," 35-38.

<sup>7</sup> Garrison, "Virginia Avenue NW Cultural Landscape Inventory," 39-40.



Figure 10: Plan for the City Intended for the Permanent Seat of the Government of the United States, showing Virginia Avenue NW with open spaces highlighted. Pierre Charles L'Enfant; US Coast and Geodetic Survey and United States Commissioner of Public Buildings, 1791 (Library of Congress).

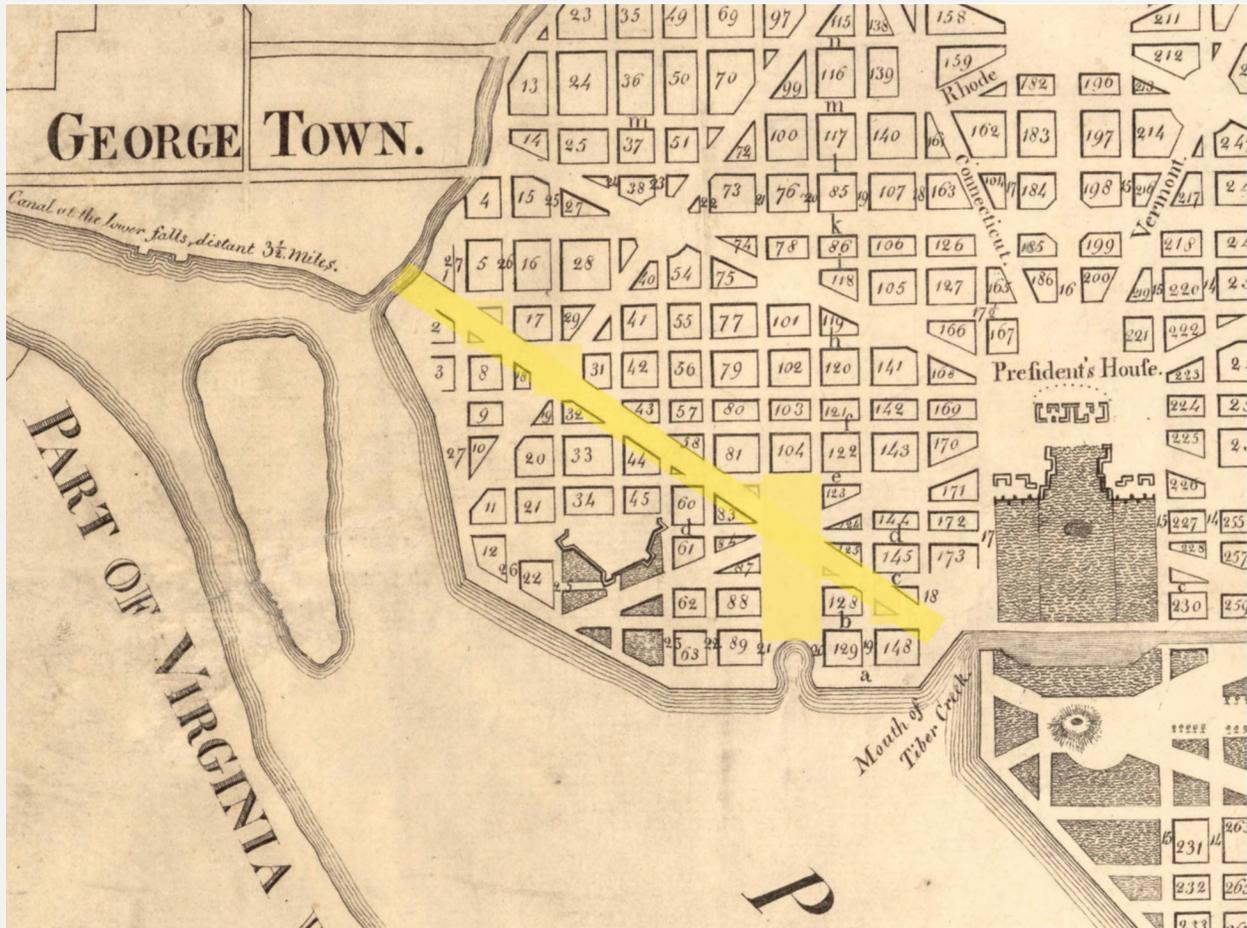


Figure 11: Plan of the City of Washington in the territory of Columbia, showing Virginia Avenue NW with open spaces highlighted. Andrew Ellicott, 1792 (Library of Congress).

The federal government moved from Philadelphia to Washington, DC, in 1800, but aside from the spaces around newly constructed government buildings, very little was accomplished in the way of landscape development in the first half of the nineteenth century. Virginia Avenue was surveyed and platted but remained unpaved until well into the latter half of the nineteenth century. Several maps from the early to mid-nineteenth century depict a stream or creek running from the Potomac River up the east side of Square E 87 (the future site of the William McChesney Martin, Jr. Building and Reservation 378) near the intersection of Virginia and New York Avenues NW (Figure 12).

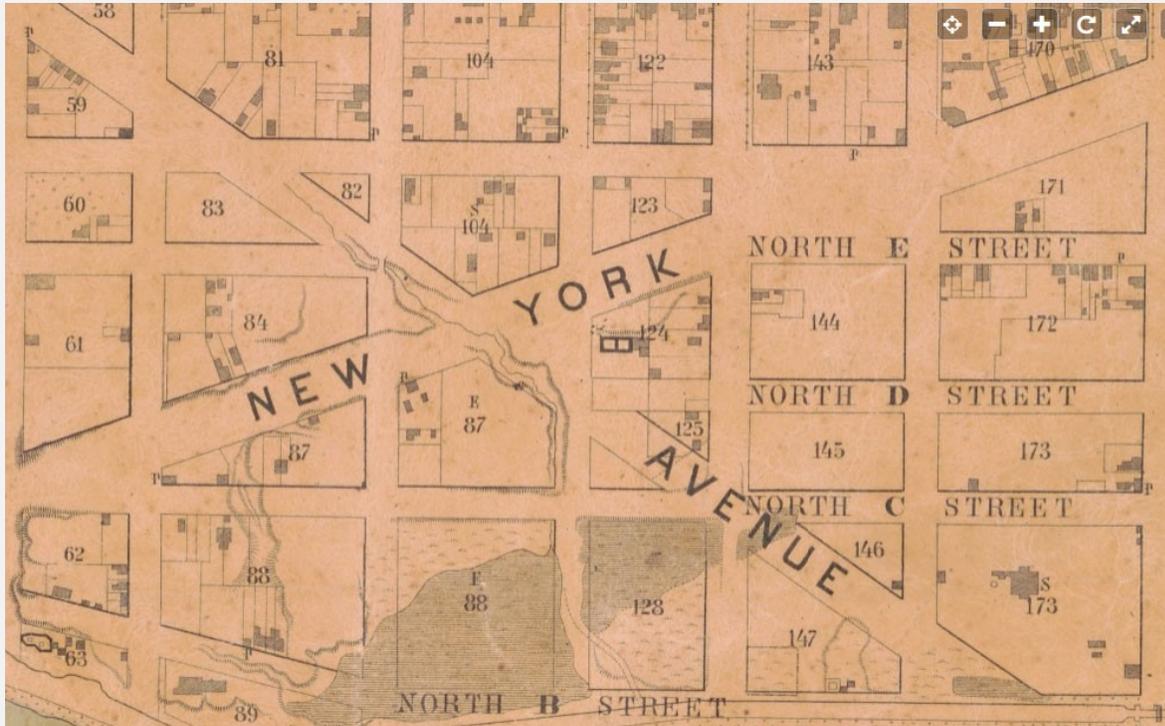


Figure 12: Detail from Map of Washington City, District of Columbia. Albert Boschke, 1857 (Library of Congress).

In the mid- to late-1800s, the city began to improve the infrastructure of roads and public spaces. Under the Board of Public Works, which was founded as part of a short-lived experiment with a territorial government for the city, a number of streets were graded and paved across the city, and open spaces were formally surveyed and some planted with lawn and trees. Sometime between 1872 and 1900, Virginia Avenue was paved with gravel between Constitution Avenue and 25th Street and rows of poplars were planted along the rights-of-way. However, most of the federal reservations in the area remained unimproved. The first listing of a reservation at the intersection of Virginia and New York Avenues NW was in 1884, when the 11,096-square foot Reservation 96 was identified as one of eight along Virginia Avenue (Reservation 96 was later renumbered as Reservation 105).<sup>8</sup> In spite of the improvement of Virginia Avenue itself, the land along it, especially the southeast half, was largely undeveloped, as demonstrated in a ca. 1894 photograph taken from the Washington Monument and looking northwest along Virginia Avenue (Figure 13). While the street grid is visible, large swaths of land are vacant. Several of the federal reservations at the northwest end of Virginia Avenue were improved at the very end of the nineteenth century, but those east of 21st Street were not included.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Garrison, "Virginia Avenue NW Cultural Landscape Inventory," 45-51.

<sup>9</sup> Garrison, "Virginia Avenue NW Cultural Landscape Inventory," 53.



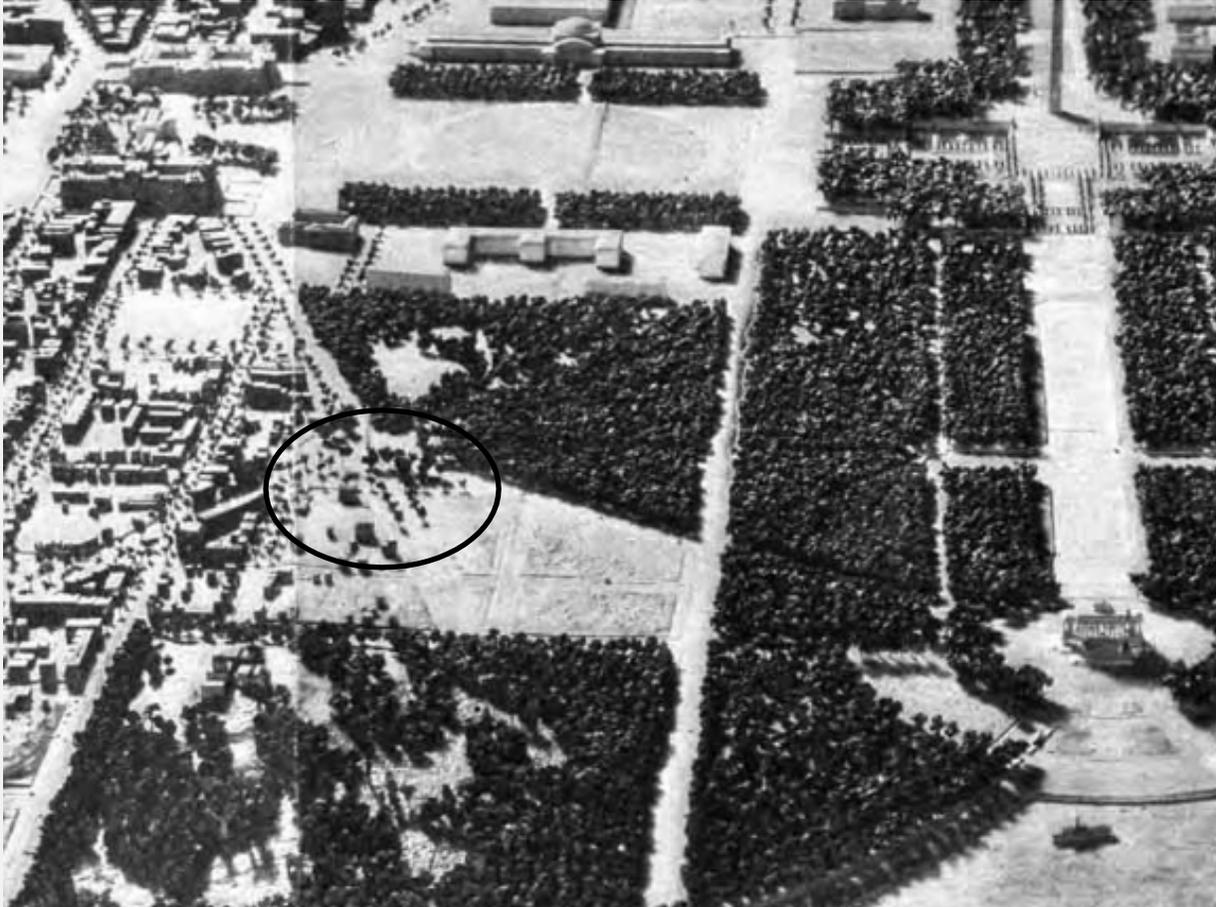
*Figure 13: Aerial view of Virginia Avenue from the Washington Monument, ca. 1894. The approximate location of the subject property is circled (Gelman Library, George Washington University).*

In the first few years of the twentieth century, the city embarked on another major planning effort. Known as the McMillan Plan, it was developed by the Senate Park Commission under Senator James McMillan of Michigan. Cited as “one of the seminal documents in the history of city planning,” the McMillan Plan was a comprehensive program to improve the monumental core and park system of the District of Columbia, including an expansion of L’Enfant’s 1791 plan for the National Mall and a system of parks and parkways throughout the city. While L’Enfant’s plan had drawn from Baroque principles of urban planning, the McMillan Plan was inspired by the Beaux Arts City Beautiful movement exemplified in the “white city” of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. City planning in this era was focused on urban improvement through civic virtue and welfare, social harmony, economic growth, and beautification.<sup>10</sup>

The McMillan Plan extended the National Mall to the west on reclaimed marshland, terminating at the planned memorial to Abraham Lincoln. It also envisioned an arm of the mall extending south, through what is now the Tidal Basin, to create a cross arm along the axis of the White House. Including the spaces between Pennsylvania and New York Avenues on the north and

<sup>10</sup> Garrison, “Virginia Avenue NW Cultural Landscape Inventory,” 55-60.

Maryland Avenue and the Potomac River on the south, this created a symmetrical, kite-shaped area bisected by north/south and east/west axes. Under this plan, a public greenspace would encompass the area between Constitution, New York, and Virginia Avenues (Figure 14). A new circle would be created at the intersection of New York and Virginia Avenues. As the plan noted, “For the most part this area from New York Avenue to the [Potomac] River should be treated as a wood, planted informally, but marked by formal roads and paths, much as the Bois de Boulogne at Paris is treated.”<sup>11</sup> The plan also discussed the parks along L’Enfant’s radial avenues, which should be adapted to the needs of individual neighborhoods and offer a variety of recreational opportunities rather than serving as the backdrop for sculptural decoration.



*Figure 14: McMillan Plan model (detail), looking east. The approximate location of the subject property is circled (McMillan Plan).*

The McMillan Plan was never approved by Congress and no funds were appropriated to implement it, although future development of the Mall did incorporate many elements of the plan and the park reservations were improved as funds became available. In particular, the extension of public greenspace north of Constitution Avenue did not come to fruition.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Charles, Moore, ed., "The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia," [McMillan Plan] (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1902), Chapter 3, page 51.

<sup>12</sup> Garrison, "Virginia Avenue NW Cultural Landscape Inventory," 60.

### *Early Twentieth Century Development*

For the first few decades of the twentieth century, development at the southeast end of Virginia Avenue remained piecemeal. Another image taken from the Washington Monument looking northwest along Virginia Avenue between 1906 and 1915 shows little change (Figure 15). A few more buildings are present, but the remaining land remained largely unimproved.



*Figure 15: Aerial view of Virginia Avenue from the Washington Monument, ca. 1906-1915. The approximate location of the subject property is circled (Detroit Publishing Company).*

During World War I, the federal government placed a number of temporary buildings in this area to house war-related functions. One of these, Temporary Building No. 4, was built on the south half of Square E 87, facing C Street between 20th and 21st Streets (Figure 16 and Figure 17). After the war, many of the “temporary” buildings remained and were converted to office space for federal government agencies. Temporary Building No. 4, built of “wood, cardboard, and stucco,” later housed the Federal Trade Commission and two bureaus of the Labor Department. In 1930, the building caught fire and burned, destroying many records in the process.<sup>13</sup> The remains of the building were torn down a few months later, leaving the lot empty once again. Reservation 105 remained vacant during this period (Figure 18).

<sup>13</sup> “26 Fireman Injured, Records Lost, as Fire Razes U.S. Structure,” *Evening Star*, August 31, 1930, 1-2.

DC State Historic Preservation Office  
Determination of Eligibility Form for Reservations 105 and 378

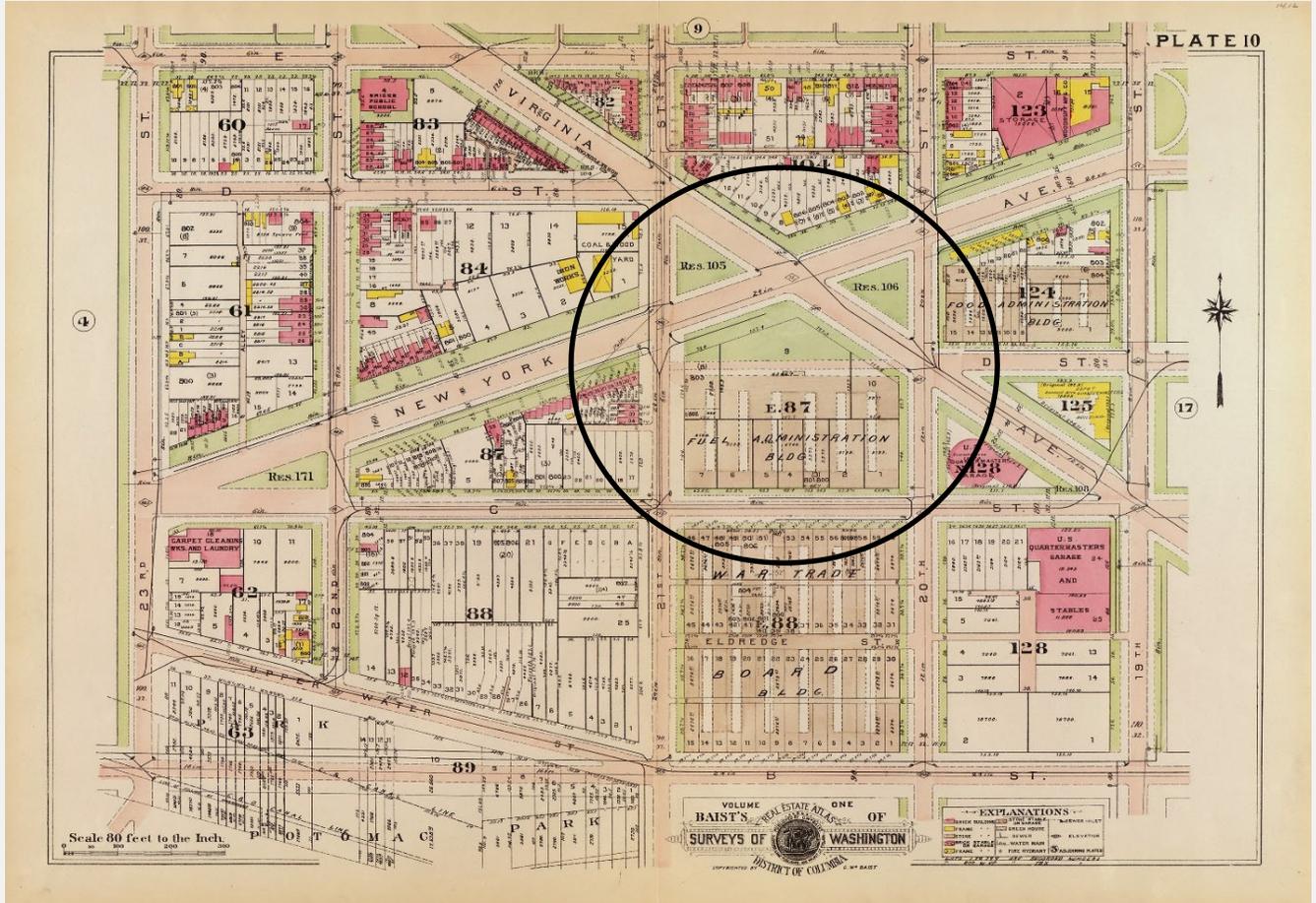


Figure 16: 1919 survey map showing the Temporary Administration Building on Square E 87, circled. Note also Reservation 105 (Baist's Real Estate Survey of Washington DC, 1919. Volume 1, Plate 10).



Figure 17: Photograph of Temporary Building No. 4, from a 1927 survey of federal reservations by the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks, Washington, DC.



*Figure 18: Photograph of Reservation 105 looking east from the intersection of New York and Virginia Avenues, from a 1927 survey of federal reservations by the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks, Washington, DC.*

Shortly after the destruction of Temporary Building No. 4, the National Capital Park and Planning Commission (NCPPC), predecessor to the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), began a comprehensive plan for this largely undeveloped area. Renamed the “Northwest Rectangle,” it was envisioned as an enclave of new federal buildings similar in concept to the Federal Triangle on the east side of the Ellipse. The NCPPC’s plan, prepared by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., identified the Northwest Rectangle as the future site of the Navy and War Department headquarters and an additional five public and institutional buildings, including the US Public Health Service headquarters. The NCPPC recommended that the buildings should be “regarded as part of a single related group.”<sup>14</sup> The Public Health Service Building (later known as the South Interior Building and currently as the Federal Reserve Board-East Building) was completed in 1933, and the Main Interior Building in 1936.

<sup>14</sup> Emily Hotaling Eig and Laura V. Trieschmann, EHT Tracerics, “Northwest Rectangle,” National Register of Historic Places nomination, December 1998, 29-30.

### *The Federal Reserve*

In 1937, the Federal Reserve Board completed their new headquarters on the block south of Square E 87. The Federal Reserve had been established in 1913 as the central banking system of the United States to set federal monetary policy and serve as the government's bank. Until 1937, the Federal Reserve Board occupied offices in the Treasury Building on Pennsylvania Avenue with other employees in satellite offices. The Board decided to consolidate its operations in a new building on Constitution Avenue between 20th and 21st Streets NW. Designed by Paul Philippe Cret, the headquarters building, later renamed for long-time Federal Reserve chair Marriner S. Eccles, was completed in 1937.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the site for the Eccles Building, the Federal Reserve Board also acquired the southern portion of Square E 87 for future expansion and had Cret prepare a design for an annex building. When the Eccles Building was constructed, a tunnel was built under C Street, in anticipation of underground access to a future new annex.<sup>16</sup> Two years later, the northern portion of Square E 87 was reassigned to National Capital Parks (National Park Service) for inclusion in the District of Columbia park system, and designated as Reservation 378 (Figure 19).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Cret also designed the nearby Pan American Union Headquarters at 17th Street and Constitution Avenue in association with architect Albert Kelsey, built in 1908-1910.

<sup>16</sup> Dedication Program for the William McChesney Martin, Jr. Building, November 19, 1974, copy in the William McChesney Martin, Jr. Papers, Series V, Subseries A: Martin FRB Building, 1971-1974, Box 20, Folder 6, Missouri History Museum.

<sup>17</sup> National Capital Parks, "Land Transfer Order No. 611," June 23, 1939. Copy provided by the National Park Service.

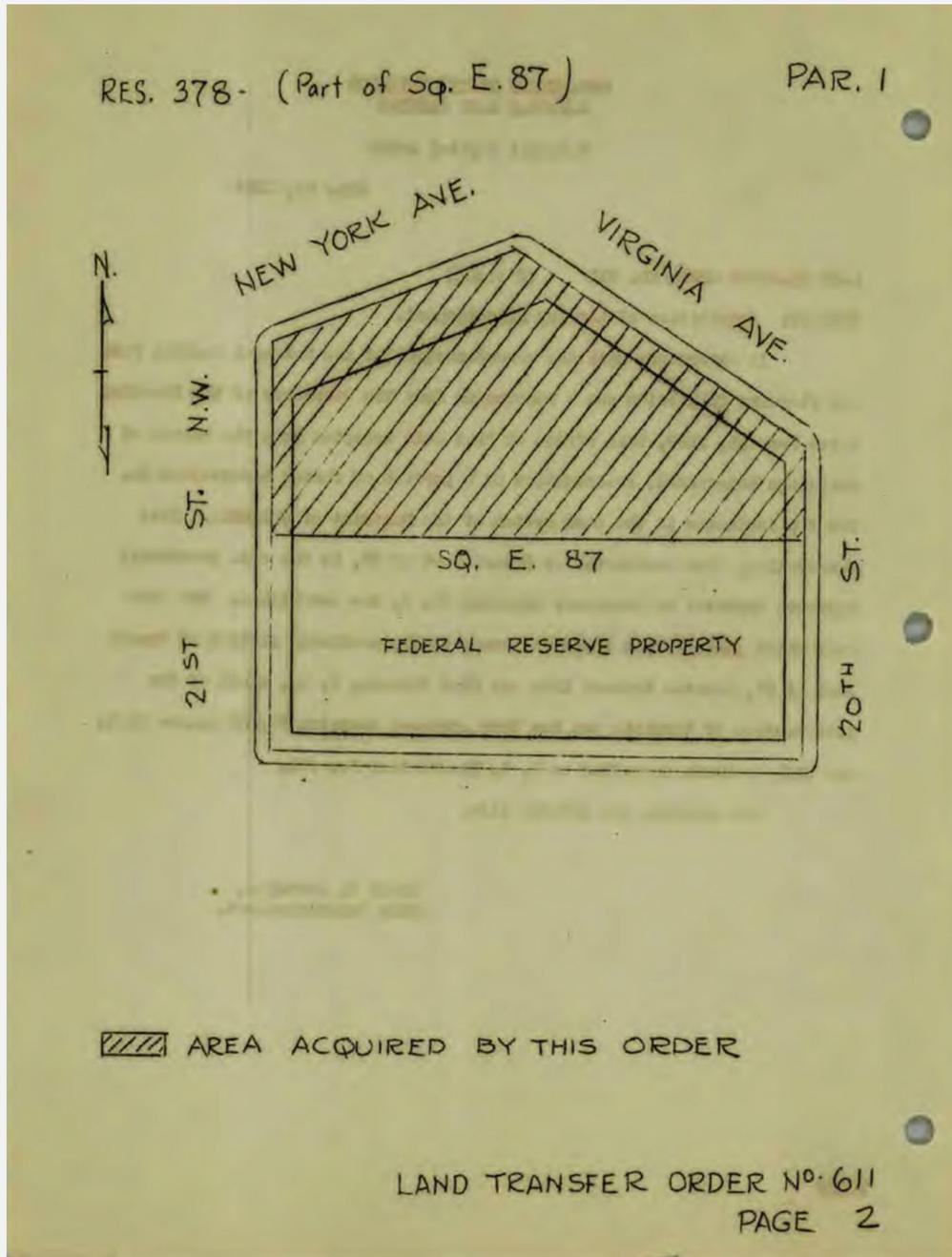


Figure 19: A sketch map of Square E 87 showing the portion owned by the Federal Reserve and the area transferred to the National Park Service in 1939 (National Park Service).

Further development of the plan for the Northwest Rectangle included the closure of New York Avenue between Virginia Avenue and 21st Street NW in 1941. This area was incorporated into Reservation 105, bringing the total area to 21,154 square feet or approximately half an acre (Figure 19). The city retained a 20' easement for maintenance of a water main beneath the former roadway (Figure 20).



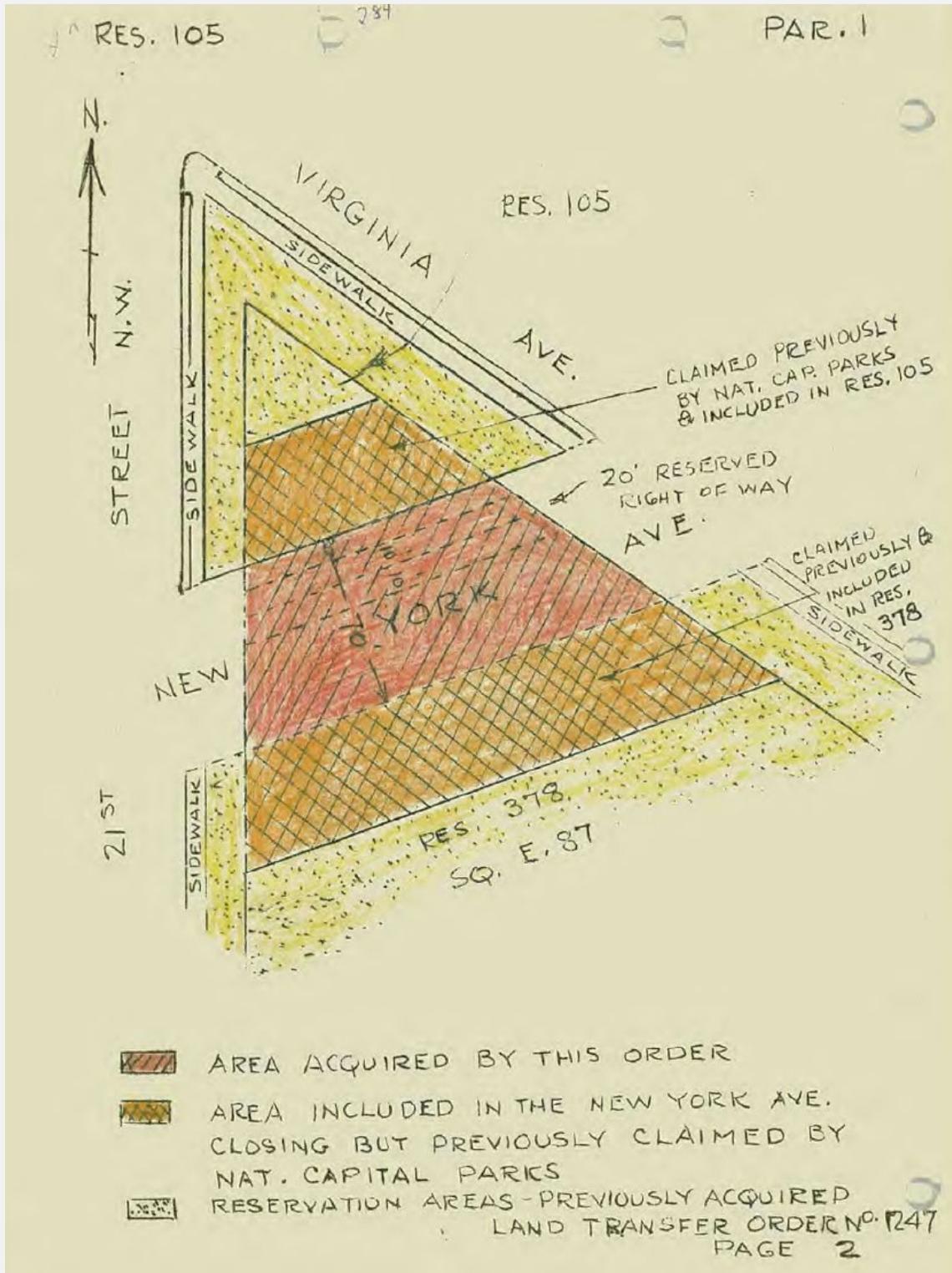


Figure 21: Acquisition of land drawing showing area of New York Avenue incorporated into Reservation 105, dated 1942 (National Park Service).

A development plan dated to the same year depicts the planned closure of New York Avenue beginning at 18th Street NW, and also shows anticipated new buildings and public spaces, including the planned Federal Reserve Annex on the south side of Square E 87 and a public park

on either side of Virginia Avenue NW between 20th and 21st Streets, including both Reservations 105 and 378 (Figure 21).

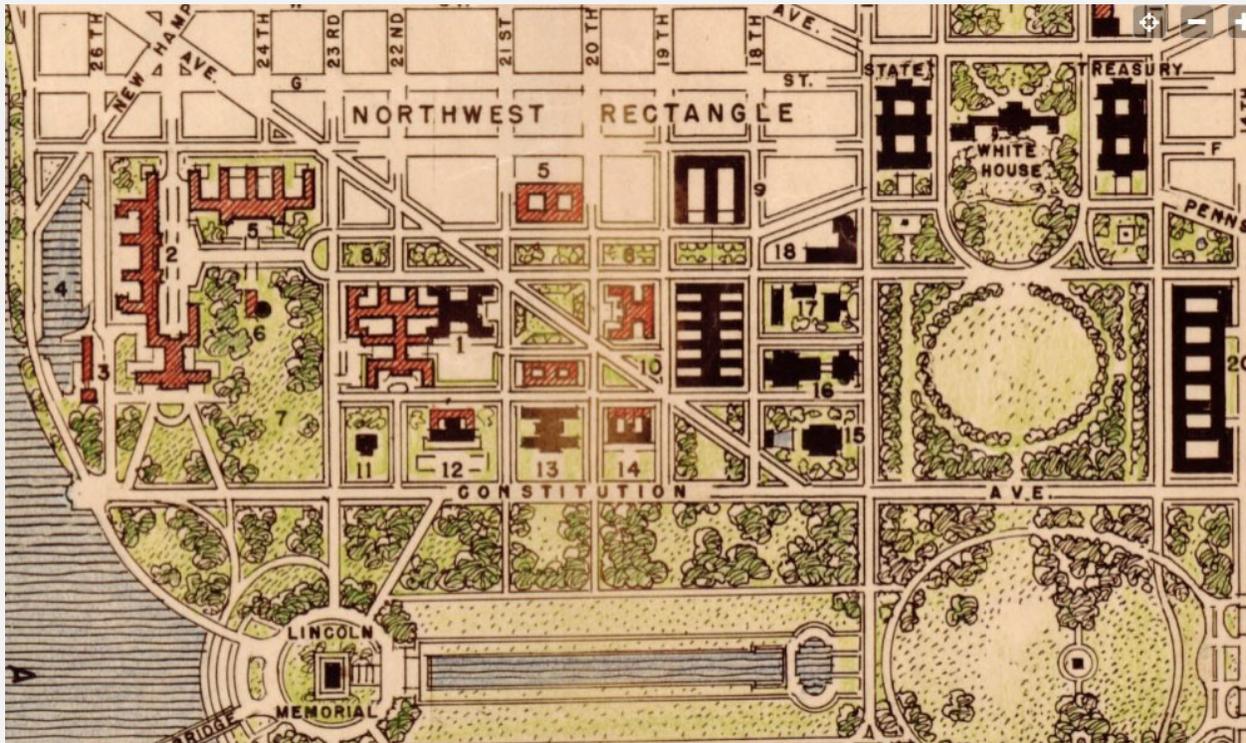


Figure 22: Detail from *Development of the Central Area West and East of the Capitol – Washington DC, 1941* (Library of Congress).

Over the next ten years, Reservation 105, including the closed portion of New York Avenue, was formally developed as a public park. The triangular-shaped reservation was bordered by sidewalks on Virginia Avenue and 21st Street. Triangular paved walks outlined the park shape with plantings around the perimeter and within the triangle. Another paved walk bisected the park east-west from Virginia Avenue to 21st Street, and large shade trees were planted in the southern portion of the park. Meanwhile, Square E 87, including the future Federal Reserve Annex lot and Reservation 378, were used as surface parking for the Federal Reserve Board and the National Park Service.

In 1956, the government of Italy presented a reproduction of the *Discus Thrower* (Discobolos) to the United States. The original statue was sculpted in Greece about 450 BC, and a copy made for a Roman family around the first century AD. This copy, rediscovered around 1781, was taken by Adolph Hitler in 1938 and then returned to Italy in 1948. The reproduction was cast in bronze by the Bearzi Foundry in Florence and presented to the people of the United States by the people of Italy in appreciation of the assistance the United States had provided in returning the Italian statue. The statue was temporarily installed in the White House Rose Garden for the presentation while a suitable location was found for it. The Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) considered several potential sites and decided to place it in the park at Reservation 105. It was placed on a pillar of African gray granite topped by a white marble capital, donated by the City of Rome. In 1959, Reservation 105 was named in honor of Edward J. Kelly, superintendent of National Capital Parks from 1950 to 1958.

### ***Virginia Avenue Improvement and the Development of the Reserve Board Annex***

In the early 1960s, two major projects substantially altered Square E 87 and the surrounding streets. In 1962, the Federal Reserve Board commissioned the architectural firm of Harbeson, Hough, Livingston, and Larson (H2L2), the successor firm of Paul Philippe Cret, to complete the design of its long-planned annex on the south portion of Square E 87. Although Cret had prepared drawings for the annex in the 1930s, H2L2's design was a contemporary interpretation of classicism that bore little resemblance to Cret's design. However, the H2L2 design did complement the proportions and materials of Cret's Eccles Building. As planning proceeded for the new building, which would include an expanded park north and east of the building, attention also turned to Virginia Avenue, which had become a heavily traveled commuter route. In 1964, the NCPC published its "Special Streets Plan" for Virginia Avenue. This report noted that Virginia Avenue was the "backbone of an important area now undergoing many changes of practical and cultural significance," specifically the development of the Northwest Rectangle over the past thirty years. The area east of 23rd Street NW had been largely built out with the exception of the planned Federal Reserve annex, but the focus on government and institutional uses left the area relatively vacant outside of the workday. The NCPC suggested mixing in residential, retail, and entertainment uses to enliven the area.<sup>18</sup>

The report recommended widening Virginia Avenue from five to six lanes, but emphasized its importance as the only avenue surviving from the L'Enfant plan from which the Washington Monument was framed "through a tree-fringed Avenue in a framework of urban architecture."<sup>19</sup> Thus, it was paramount to replant straight tree lines along Virginia Avenue to maintain the vista, as well as ensure consistent pavement widths. The plan also implemented a number of adjustments to the street grid. These included "swinging" C Street west of Virginia Avenue north from its original path to meet Virginia Avenue at a less acute angle, and curving 20th Street north of Virginia Avenue to the west for the same reason. Finally, 20th Street was closed between Virginia Avenue and C Street, adding a small wedge-shaped patch of land (Square N-128) previously containing a circular government garage and gas station to the park east of the Federal Reserve Annex.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to changes to the streets, the Special Streets plan also addressed the parklands along Virginia Avenue. It noted that the National Park Service was responsible for making these spaces "consistent visually with the general character of the avenue, to provide viewing points for the benefit of pedestrian visitors, and oases for the relaxation of those workers in the area who like to eat their lunches out under the trees. The widespread opportunity to indulge this pleasant habit is one of the happy by-products of the L'Enfant plan."<sup>21</sup> The areas to either side of Virginia Avenue at Reservation 105/378 represented the only break in the line of street trees along the avenue. Instead, the hedge at Kelly Park was to be eliminated to allow a view of the State Department entrance, and the development of park areas with trees at Reservation 378 and across Virginia Avenue to the north replaced the line of street trees (Figure 23). The report noted that the area of Reservation 378 north of the planned Federal Reserve annex building would be

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<sup>18</sup> National Capital Planning Commission, "Special Streets Plan for Virginia Avenue NW," 1964, 4.

<sup>19</sup> National Capital Planning Commission, "Special Streets Plan for Virginia Avenue NW," 1964, 9.

<sup>20</sup> National Capital Planning Commission, "Special Streets Plan for Virginia Avenue NW," 1964, 23-25.

<sup>21</sup> National Capital Planning Commission, "Special Streets Plan for Virginia Avenue NW," 1964, 8.

finished with a series of rectangular lawns linking the façade of the building to the rest of the composition.<sup>22</sup>

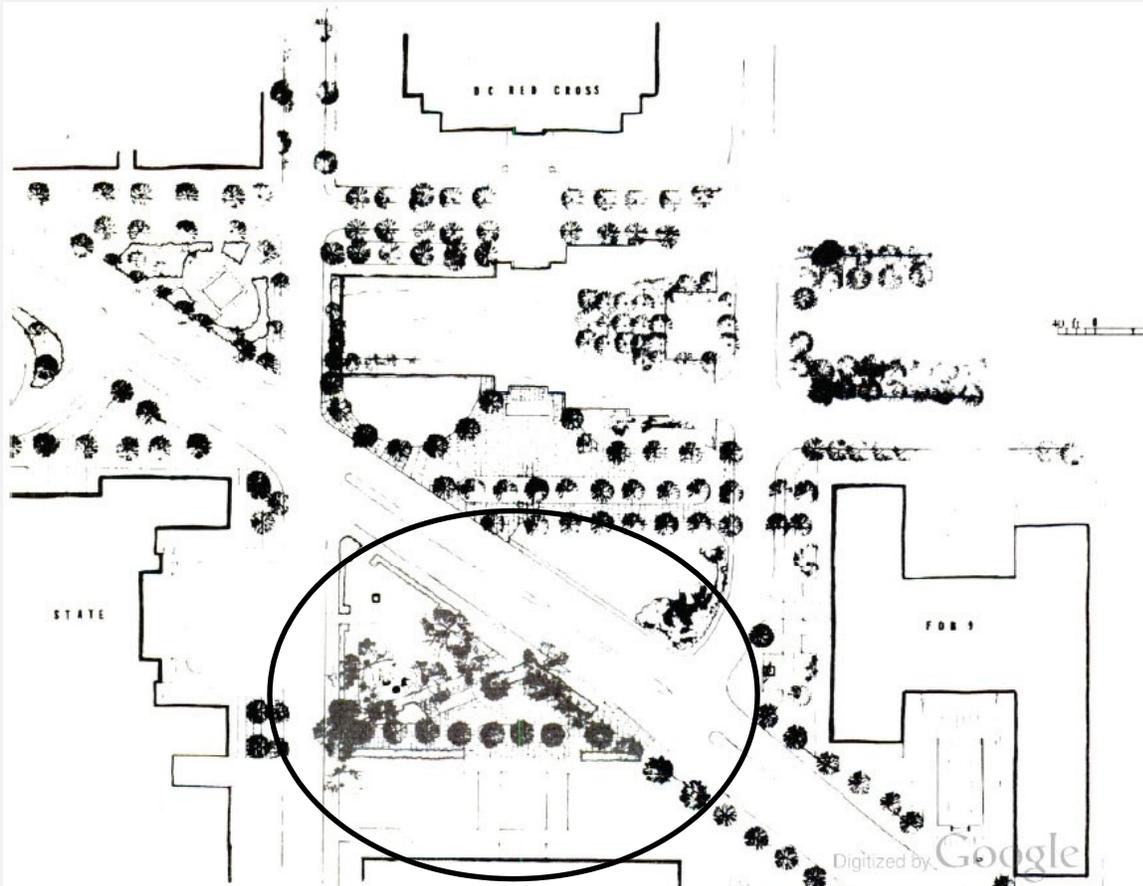


Figure 23: Illustration of Virginia Avenue Plan between 20th and 21st Streets from the 1964 Special Streets Plan. Reservation 378/105 is circled.

In the mid to late 1960s, the Federal Reserve’s Board of Governors and the National Park Service negotiated a series of agreements for the development of Reservation 378, which eventually included the area to the east of the new annex (now Robert Latham Owen Park). Prior to the construction of the annex, both Federal Reserve and National Park Service employees used the site for parking. The construction plans for the new annex included two underground garages, which would be extended to the park areas north and east of the building. The Federal Reserve Board would be responsible for construction of the garages, a portion of which was designated for use by the Department of the Interior, while the National Park Service would own and maintain the park areas above the garages. The new area east of the annex building created by the realignment of streets, which included portions of Square N-128, was transferred to the National Park Service and became part of Reservation 378, bringing the total area of the reservation to 2.26 acres. Costs for development of the park, which was included in the construction contract for the new building, were to be shared by the NPS and the Federal Reserve Board.<sup>23</sup> At around the same time (1969), 3,616 square feet of Reservation 105 was

<sup>22</sup> National Capital Planning Commission, “Special Streets Plan for Virginia Avenue NW,” 1964, 28.

<sup>23</sup> “Agreement Between National Park Service, Department of the Interior, and Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System,” signed May 5, 1965. Copy provided by the National Park Service; Dedication Program for the William McChesney Martin, Jr. Building, November 19, 1974, copy in the William McChesney Martin, Jr. Papers,

transferred to the city for the widening of Virginia Avenue, but the city also transferred an additional 9,920 square feet of land back to the National Park Service, bringing the total area of Reservation 105 to 27,458 square feet, or 0.63 acres.<sup>24</sup>

The Board broke ground on its new annex in 1971. At the same time, landscape architect George E. Patton was designing the landscape above the garages. Patton, a native of North Carolina, began his career at Simonds and Simonds in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, before opening his own firm in Philadelphia in 1954. Patton designed landscapes across the United States, from the Locust Walk at the University of Pennsylvania to the Kimball Museum of Art in Fort Worth, Texas. He served as the first Vice President of the American Society of Landscape Architects in 1965 and taught at the University of Pennsylvania.<sup>25</sup>

Patton's modernist landscape design (Figure 24) complemented the new annex building, particularly at the southeast corner, where hardscape surrounded a large oval granite fountain and terraced plaza with built-in seating. Other features of the design included a sunken tennis court on the western edge, raised granite planting beds, specially designed lampposts, and large open lawns with evergreen and magnolia plantings.

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Series V, Subseries A: Martin FRB Building, 1971-1974, Box 20, Folder 6, Missouri History Museum; Agreement among The Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System Acting by and through Its Secretary, the Department of the Interior Acting by and through the Assistant Secretary for Administration, and the Interior Department Recreation Association Acting by and through Its Parking Committee," dated July 17, 1968; Amendments to Agreement signed August 21 and August 22, 1969. Copy provided by the National Park Service.

<sup>24</sup> Reservation 105 property card, provided by the National Park Service.

<sup>25</sup> "George E. Patton," The Cultural Landscape Foundation (website) *Pioneers of Landscape Architecture*, <https://tclf.org/pioneer/george-e-patton>. Accessed May 27, 2020.

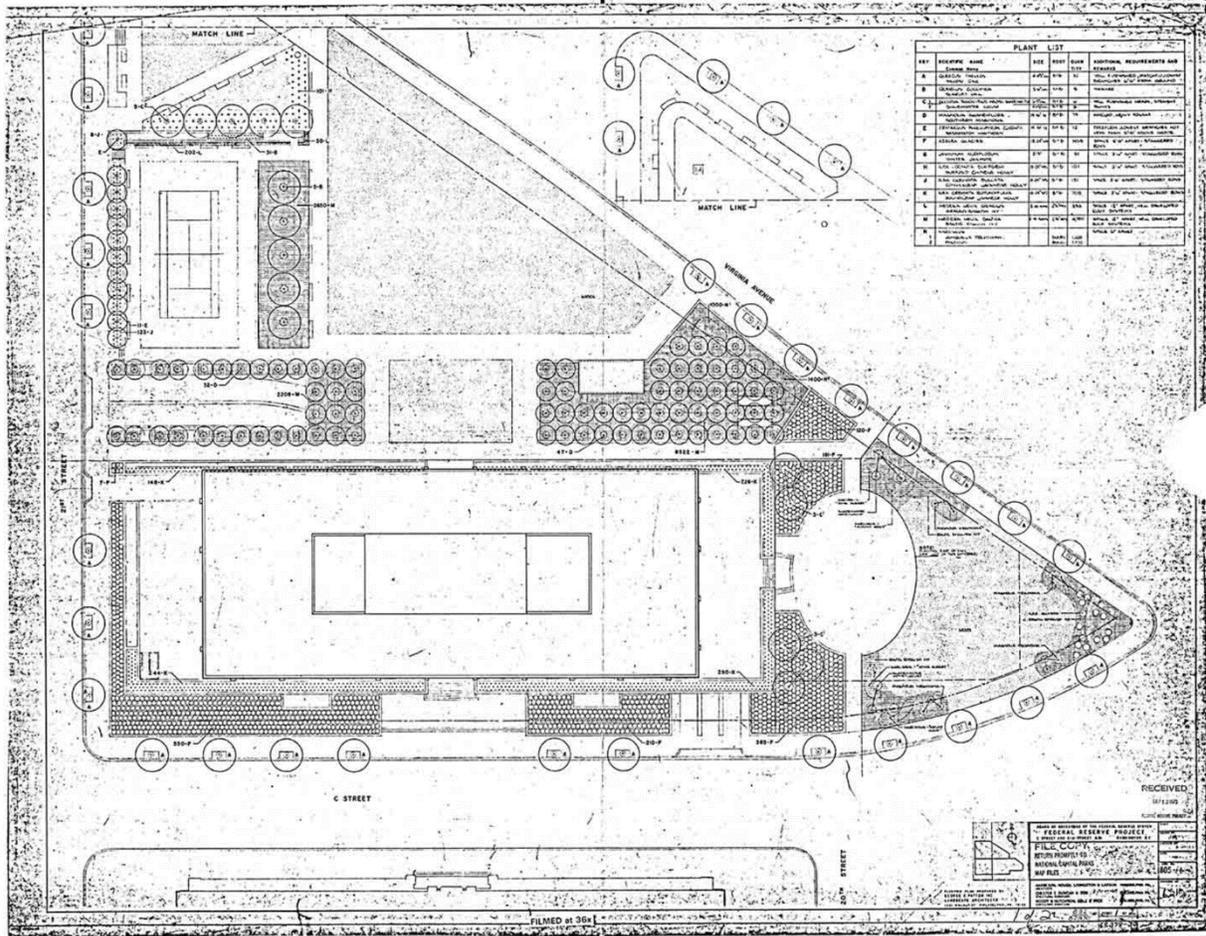


Figure 24: George E. Patton's design and planting plan for Reservation 378, 1973.

The Federal Reserve Board annex was completed in 1974 and named for William McChesney Martin, Jr., Chair of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve from 1951 to 1970. Two years later, the Board dedicated the southeast portion of Reservation 378 in honor of Robert Latham Owen, a Senator from Oklahoma and member of the Cherokee Nation who had co-sponsored the Glass-Owen Bill creating the Federal Reserve System in 1913. A pamphlet presented at the dedication ceremony included a sketch (Figure 25) and description of the fountain and surrounding landscape:

The park site and the fountain were designed in accordance with the Virginia Avenue Development Plan in consultation with the National Park Service and the National Capital Planning Commission. The triangular shaped park's focal point is a large axial water display contributed to the Federal City by the Federal Reserve Board. The fountain was designed to operate most of the year with a foamed water ellipse reaching approximately 25 feet high. During the winter months, the cobblestone platform retains a low sculptured effect which serves to enhance the park. The name "Robert Latham Owen Park" is inscribed in the low granite wall immediately in front of the stairs leading from the Martin Building Podium to the fountain. A large bronze plaque citing Senator Owen's

major accomplishments and highlighting the enactment of the Federal Reserve Act is inlaid in the granite walk between the wall and the fountain.<sup>26</sup>

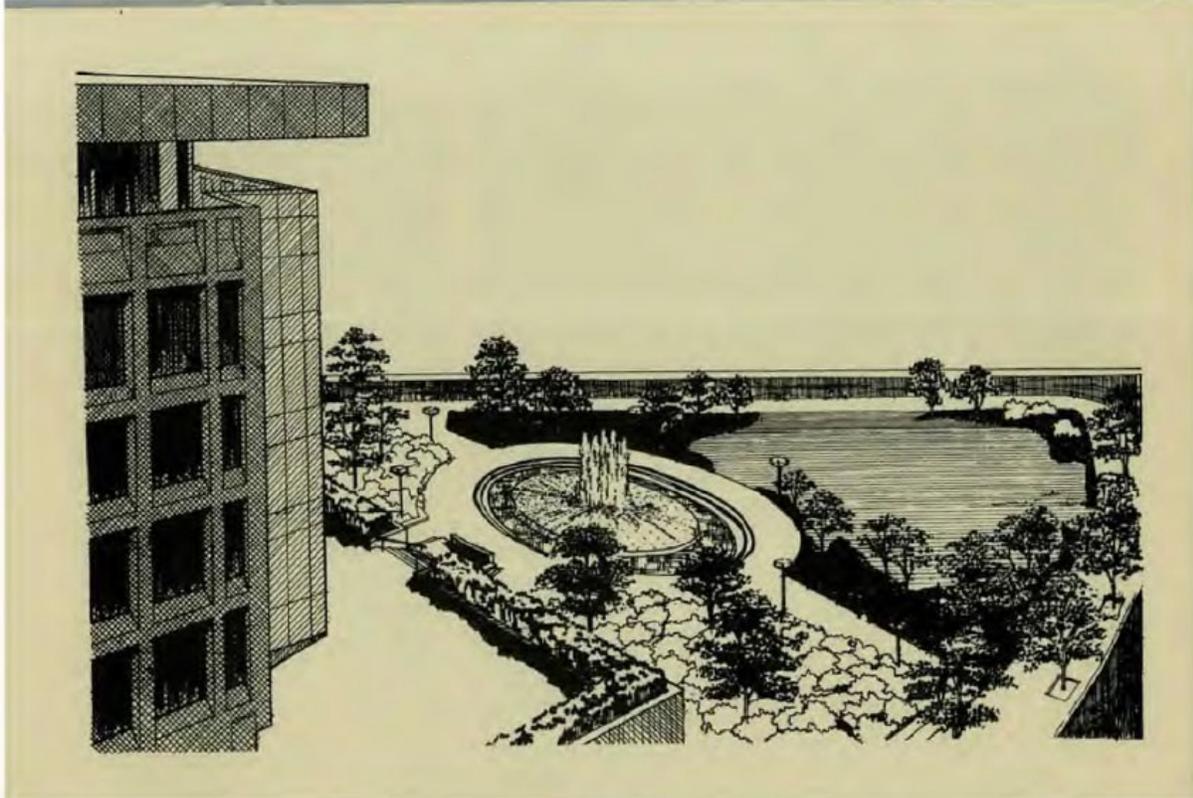


Figure 25: Sketch of Robert Latham Owen Park from the 1976 dedication ceremony pamphlet.

### ***Redesign by Oehme, van Sweden***

Over the winter of 1976-1977, harsh weather destroyed most of Patton's evergreen plantings. In February 1977, an article in the Washington, DC, *Evening Star* caught the eye of David Lilly, one of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve. In it, two landscape architects, Wolfgang Oehme and James van Sweden, who had recently formed their own firm outlined their recommendations for "creating the natural look in your garden" through the use of native plants or hardier foreign species with similar characteristics, such as American and Asian varieties of witch hazel, Rudbeckia "Goldstrum", Japanese Snowbell (*Styrax japonicum*), American sorrel, and hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*). The article noted that Oehme and van Sweden used ornamental grasses "to great effect...to create the feeling of a natural landscape," including pennisetum and miscanthus.<sup>27</sup>

James van Sweden later suggested that Lilly, who had a lifelong interest in plants, hire Oehme, van Sweden to redesign the garden at the Martin Building on the strength of their use of witch

<sup>26</sup> Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, "Robert Latham Owen Park," Dedication Ceremony Pamphlet, 1976.

<sup>27</sup> Carl R. Hahn, "Creating the Natural Look in Your Garden," *Evening Star*, February 27, 1977, 109.

hazel.<sup>28</sup> Wolfgang Oehme (1930-2011) was a native of Germany who graduated from the University of Berlin with a degree in landscape architecture before moving to the United States in 1957. Before founding the partnership with van Sweden, Oehme worked for the Baltimore County Department of Parks and in independent practice. James van Sweden (1935-2013), grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan, earning a degree in landscape architecture from the University of Michigan and then studying for three years in the Netherlands. He was a partner at Marcou, O’Leary and Associates prior to partnering with Oehme.<sup>29</sup>

For the Martin Building site, van Sweden designed the hardscape while Oehme created the planting plan (Figure 26). They retained portions of Patton’s design, in particular the Owen fountain, its surrounding terrace, and the light fixtures. One of the goals of the redesign was to create more human-scale and usable public space, especially for workers from nearby government office buildings who liked to eat their lunches outside. Oehme and van Sweden divided the space along Virginia Avenue into separate seating areas, delineated large lawn panels to feature rotating sculpture displays, and created shaded niches that encouraged workers and pedestrians to linger in the space. Earthen berms encouraged deeper root growth over the roof of the north garage, allowing the pair to place dramatic swaths of ornamental grasses and perennials influenced by the landscapes of the Great Plains.<sup>30</sup>



Figure 26: Oehme, van Sweden’s 1977 redesign plan.

<sup>28</sup> James van Sweden, Oral History Interview Transcript, Interviewed by Charles A. Birnbaum and James Sheldon (videographer), for The Cultural Landscape Foundation, August 2009, 52.

<sup>29</sup> “Wolfgang Oehme” and “James van Sweden,” The Cultural Landscape Foundation (website) Pioneers of Landscape Architecture, <https://tclf.org/pioneer/wolfgang-oehme> and <https://tclf.org/pioneer/james-van-sweden>. Accessed May 27, 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Garrison, “Virginia Avenue NW Cultural Landscape Inventory,” 77.

In September and October 1977, Oehme and van Sweden, along with David Lilly, presented the plans to the CFA. According to van Sweden, they illustrated their plan with images of gardens in Leipzig and Dresden, Germany. While they did not tell the CFA that the images were from Cold War-era East Germany, van Sweden recalled that CFA chair Carter Brown remarked that they did not look like the typical landscape of Washington, DC, at which point David Lilly stood up, pointing his finger at Brown and saying “that is just the point.” “And that’s the kind of client you need to change the world,” van Sweden later remarked.<sup>31</sup> Indeed the CFA’s initial letter review of the plan noted that “some of the proposed plant materials, especially the grasses, appear to be out of character with the formal open setting that we feel the architecture has to have” and in another letter in October noted that while the design was “moving in the right direction” they still wanted further simplicity, pointing to the Eccles Building landscaping on Constitution Avenue as “some of the finest landscaping in Washington.”<sup>32</sup>

While Oehme and van Sweden did make some adjustments to simplify their plans, especially around the Owen fountain, they carried out their overall plan. Still, it took some time for the plantings to develop, and in the meantime, David Lilly invited Oehme and van Sweden to give a lunchtime lecture in the garden to talk about the long-term plan; four hundred people attended.<sup>33</sup>

The landscape of the Martin Building was Oehme, van Sweden’s first public commission and what van Sweden termed their “big break.” It was the first institutional rendition of what would become their innovative “New American Garden” – “the elevation of a domestic garden typology, based on perennials and grasses, to a public landscape.”<sup>34</sup> Van Sweden remembered that “it got a lot of notice because no one had ever seen anything that looked quite like this in Washington,” and it has remained an important garden design in the city of Washington. On the strength of their Federal Reserve work, Oehme, van Sweden received commissions for dozens of similar gardens in Washington, DC, including the Einstein Garden at the National Academy of Sciences, the German American Friendship Garden, the New American Garden at the National Arboretum, and the International Center garden.<sup>35</sup> They were also commissioned by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) to redesign the plantings at the M. Paul Friedberg-designed Pershing Park, leading to a nearly twenty year association with the PADC. As expressed by Lilly, “The symbolism and imagery of the Federal Reserve landscape have had a tremendous impact on the environment of Washington, DC. Hopefully, it seems to be moving away from the aristocratic European model toward a reflection of the egalitarian United States and its great plains heritage.”<sup>36</sup>

The Martin Building landscape was an important transition in Oehme, van Sweden’s practice. Their early style was grounded in the formal geometric modernist tradition associated with landscape architects such as Dan Kiley, Lawrence Halprin, and M. Paul Friedberg, particularly the use of geometric rigidity in their planting plans.<sup>37</sup> Beginning with a few private gardens and

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<sup>31</sup> James van Sweden, Oral History Interview Transcript, 52.

<sup>32</sup> Commission of Fine Arts, Meeting Minutes, September 27, 1977, 8-9 and Exhibit J, and October 25, 1977, 3 and Exhibit E.

<sup>33</sup> James van Sweden, Oral History Interview Transcript, 53.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas E. Luebke, FAIA, Secretary, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, to Lisa Mendelson-Ielmini, Acting Director, Region 1 – National Capitol Area, National Park Service, letter dated February 27, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> James van Sweden, Oral History Interview Transcript, 53-54.

<sup>36</sup> Oehme van Sweden, accessed 29 May 2020 at <https://www.ovsla.com/studio/the-new-american-garden/>.

<sup>37</sup> Cultural Landscape Foundation, “The New American Garden,” accessed 29 May 2020 at <https://tclf.org/sites/default/files/microsites/new-american-garden/introduction.html>; Jared Green, “The Enduring

then the Martin Building project, they abandoned that rigidity for the plant-dominated designs that became a signature feature of their work. Van Sweden expressed in a 2008 *Washingtonian* magazine interview, “We didn’t really mean our work to be a new American garden. We did several private gardens, which were published right away because they were very dramatic and different. They did not feature lawn but tapestry-like plantings and perennials and masses of the same plant—3,000 black-eyed Susans instead of six.” According to van Sweden, after the design of the Federal Reserve landscape, which was inspired by the American meadow and natural landscapes, “the gardening world pinned that name – the New American Garden – on us, and we’ve had it ever since.”<sup>38</sup>

The legacy of the New American Garden extended beyond their immediate body of work, which was largely concentrated on the East Coast. As expressed by The Cultural Landscape Foundation, “Wolfgang Oehme and James van Sweden revolutionized landscape architecture with the creation of the New American Garden, a type of garden characterized by large swaths of grasses and fields of perennials. Their style celebrated the seasonal splendor of the American meadow while promoting its inherent ecological, sustainable, aesthetic, and ornamental values.”<sup>39</sup> Van Sweden wrote, “What’s new about our New American Garden is what’s new about America itself: It is vigorous and audacious, and it vividly blends the natural and the cultivated.”<sup>40</sup> In 1990, the partners published their highly influential *Bold Romantic Gardens*, a retrospective of their first fifteen years of practice and a distillation of their approach to creating bold, free-spirited gardens for all seasons. As co-author Susan Rademacher noted, “What made them so right for the moment was their fluid wedding of horticulture and architectural structure. Horticulture was the element missing in so much of residential landscape architecture, and structural design was the missing element in much of popular gardening. Oehme, van Sweden leapt across these gaps with a bravado that thrilled clients and readers.” The book featured the Martin Building landscape, cited as a significant milestone in their development. Of it, they wrote “Designed for easy maintenance, it returns a garden ethic to the public landscape. It shows how gardens are possible for all the people who don’t have the opportunity to enjoy gardens in private life.”<sup>41</sup> Several other books followed, including *Gardening with Water* (1995), *Gardening with Nature* (1997), *Architecture in the Garden* (2003), and *The Artful Garden: Creative Inspiration for Landscape Design* (2011). Their civic and commercial projects include David Lilly Plaza in Minneapolis, Minnesota (1986), Rockefeller Park in New York, New York (1992), the Francis Scott Key Memorial in Washington, DC (1993), the Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe, Illinois (1997), the National World War II Memorial in Washington, DC (1997), and the Garden at Cornerstone, Sonoma, California (2006).

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Appeal of Oehme, van Sweden’s New American Garden,” *The Dirt*, 15 October 2015, accessed 29 May 2020 at <https://dirt.asla.org/2015/10/15/the-enduring-appeal-of-oehme-van-swedens-new-american-garden/>.

<sup>38</sup> Jill Gleeson, “What I’ve Learned: Reinventing the Garden,” *Washingtonian*, 1 April 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Cultural Landscape Foundation, “The New American Garden,” accessed 29 May 2020 at <https://tclf.org/sites/default/files/microsites/new-american-garden/introduction.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Trine Tsouderous, “You got it! Readers Love Quiet Beauty of Botanic Garden,” *Chicago Tribune*, 17 August 2006.

<sup>41</sup> Susan Rademacher, “On the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Bold Romantic Gardens,” accessed 29 May 2020 at <https://tclf.org/news/features/25th-anniversary-bold-romantic-gardens>.

### ***Later History***

The landscape has undergone little change since the Oehme, van Sweden redesign, aside from regular maintenance. Oehme and van Sweden periodically inspected the site and made a few minor alterations for thirty years after their original work. The Federal Reserve engaged the firm after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks to harden portions of the landscape both here and at the Eccles Building, including walls, bollards, and planters that were designed to blend in with the original design while protecting against truck attacks.<sup>42</sup> The park continues to host a series of temporary sculpture installations, as it has since 1976.

## **SIGNIFICANCE AND EVALUATION**

### ***Previous Evaluations***

#### **L’Enfant Plan of the City of Washington, District of Columbia**

Reservations 105 and 378 are currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places as part of Virginia Avenue, which is a contributing feature of the National Register-listed L’Enfant Plan of the City of Washington. The L’Enfant Plan of the City of Washington, D.C., National Register documentation (NRIS#97000332; listed April 24, 1997) nominated the L’Enfant Plan as a structure under National Register Criterion A for national significance in the areas of community planning and development, landscape architecture, politics and government, and transportation; under Criterion B for its association with Pierre Charles L’Enfant; and under Criterion C for its association with L’Enfant’s internationally influential design and as an early American example of Baroque city planning. The period of significance is 1790 to 1942. The nomination provides an inventory of contributing features including individual reservations, avenues, streets, and bridges. Reservations 105 and 378 are not inventoried under the individual reservations listed as contributing to the nomination. However, the nomination notes that only “sites [i.e. parks] of one acre or more are accounted for in the Description.” Since parks and parklets less than one acre are all “...located in the rights of way of the avenues, their “space” is not lost...all sites, numbered or not, are included in the calculation of contributing and non-contributing elements.” Reservations 105 and 378 are therefore contributing elements of the Virginia Avenue landscape. The inventory listing for Virginia Avenue cites the discus thrower (discobolos) statue on Reservation 105 as a “noteworthy” feature.<sup>43</sup> The landscape designs of Reservations 105 and 378 are outside the nomination’s period of significance.

#### **Northwest Rectangle**

A draft National Register of Historic Places nomination was prepared for the Northwest Rectangle Historic District in 1997. The Northwest Rectangle, bounded by Constitution Avenue, 17th Street, New York Avenue and E Street, and 23rd Street, was evaluated as eligible for the National Register under Criterion A in the area of community planning and Criterion C in the areas of architecture and landscape architecture. The period of significance is 1891-1963. The nomination briefly discusses landscaped parks within the district and describes them as “visual

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<sup>42</sup> James van Sweden, Oral History Interview Transcript, 54.

<sup>43</sup> Sara Amy Leach and Elizabeth Barthold, “L’Enfant Plan of the City of Washington, District of Columbia,” National Register of Historic Places nomination, prepared July 1994, listed April 24, 1997.

elements essential to the setting of the district,” but the inventory of contributing resources includes only buildings and park statues. The Discus Thrower is listed as a contributing resource, while the Martin Building is noncontributing. The landscape design of Reservations 105 and 378 is outside the nomination’s period of significance.

### **Virginia Avenue NW Cultural Landscape**

A Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) was prepared for Virginia Avenue in 2019 and included an evaluation of eligibility for the avenue and its associated park reservations, including 105 (Edward Kelly Park) and 378 (Federal Reserve Annex). The CLI recommended expanding the period of significance for Virginia Avenue and its associated park reservations to 1977. The expanded period would include the construction of the Virginia Avenue NW park reservations between 1899 and 1912 and the postwar urban renewal and beautification efforts that reshaped the avenue and many of its open spaces from 1950 until the Martin Building site was designed in 1977. Reservations 105 and 378, and their associated landscape features, are listed as contributing resources in the CLI. The DC State Historic Preservation Office concurred with the findings of the CLI, including the determination of eligibility, on February 12, 2019.

The criteria and periods of significance reiterated or established in the CLI are summarized here:

#### Criterion A

**National: 1791-1792**

**Local: 1899-1912; 1950-1977**

The CLI notes that under the 1997 L’Enfant Plan nomination, small park reservations are considered nationally and locally significant under Criterion A for their association with the creation of the nation’s capital, and for their significance in the history of community planning, landscape architecture, politics and government, and transportation. The CLI states that

(a)s the capital of a new nation, Washington, DC served as a model for American city planning and a symbol of government power. L’Enfant was influenced by the Baroque designs of several European cities and 18th century gardens, as well as the political system of the new United States. The commemorative and symbolic location of buildings, streets and vistas, resulted in a singular American example of a city that physically expresses its national political role. The L’Enfant plan influenced the design of American cities such as Buffalo, New York and Cincinnati, Ohio, as well as national capitals, including Canberra, Australia and New Delhi, India.<sup>44</sup>

While Reservations 105 and 378 do not exist in the form originally laid out by L’Enfant and his successor Andrew Ellicott, the concept of small public green spaces created by the imposition of an orthogonal grid over radial avenues was an important element of the L’Enfant plan’s intention for creation of a system of green spaces across the capital, and Reservations 105 and 378 fulfill that purpose.

The CLI also states that Reservations 105 and 378 are locally significant under Criterion A in the area of community planning for their association with post-World War II redevelopment (1950-1977) of several reservations along Virginia Avenue. Following the closure of New York

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<sup>44</sup> Garrison, “Virginia Avenue NW Cultural Landscape Inventory,” 19.

Avenue and incorporation of the right-of-way into Reservation 105, it was formally developed as a public park, including the installation of the discus thrower (discobolos) statue in 1956. Reservation 378 was created through the 1960s urban renewal plan and realignment of streets under the Virginia Avenue Special Streets Plan and completed from 1971 to 1977 in conjunction with the construction of the adjacent Martin Building. As noted in the CLI, parks like Reservation 378 are “important examples of the city’s postwar attempt to revitalize areas of downtown Washington, as well as the National Park Service’s approach to park design during the mid-20th century.”<sup>45</sup>

### Criterion B

#### **National: 1791-1792**

The CLI states that under the 1997 L’Enfant Plan nomination, Virginia Avenue is significant under Criterion B for its association with Pierre Charles L’Enfant, noting that “L’Enfant’s final design is considered his masterwork, and has guided the development of Washington since its publication in 1791.”<sup>46</sup>

### Criterion C

#### **National: 1791-1792**

#### **Local: 1950-1977**

The CLI states that under the 1997 L’Enfant Plan nomination, Virginia Avenue is significant under Criterion A as part of Pierre Charles L’Enfant’s internationally influential design, and as an early American example of Baroque City planning. It notes that

The L’Enfant Plan also resulted in a number of small triangular, “parklets” where diagonal avenues met the grid of streets. These parklets are also present along Virginia Avenue NW. By superimposing a series of oblique avenues on top of a regular grid of streets, L’Enfant combined the American preference for orthogonal city planning with the European taste for grand diagonal avenues. The meeting of diagonal and orthogonal thoroughfares created the basis for the historic and contemporary system of parks in Washington, DC. As such, the large open spaces, as well as the smaller triangle parks located along Virginia Avenue NW, contribute to the overall plan of the city.<sup>47</sup>

The CLI also argues that Virginia Avenue is significant as a local expression of modernist landscape design, typical of the postwar period. This includes the George E. Patton design for Reservation 378:

[Modernist] plazas and planting plans, like those found at...(nationally significant landscape architect George E. Patton’s) Robert Latham Owen fountain, reflect the modern landscape movement’s attempt to address the massive social, physical and economic upheavals that affected cities throughout the postwar period. Pared down, easily legible designs, featuring clean lines, simple forms and restricted use of materials and plant palettes, were attempts to abandon the idea of architectural “style,” in order to present a more universally appealing, timeless landscape, as part of an effort to respond to a rapidly changing, modern world.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Garrison, “Virginia Avenue NW Cultural Landscape Inventory,” 19.

<sup>46</sup> Garrison, “Virginia Avenue NW Cultural Landscape Inventory,” 20.

<sup>47</sup> Garrison, “Virginia Avenue NW Cultural Landscape Inventory,” 21

<sup>48</sup> Garrison, Virginia Avenue NW Cultural Landscape Inventory,” 21.

### ***Determination of Eligibility Findings***

***This study evaluates the eligibility of Reservations 105 and 378 collectively and finds that the property is individually eligible for National Register listing at the national level under Criterion C as a designed landscape and work of a master (Oehme, van Sweden). Additionally, the property meets Criteria Consideration G, for properties of exceptional importance that have achieved significance within the last fifty years. The property retains sufficient integrity to convey its historical and architectural significance.***

#### **Criterion A: Properties that are associated or linked to events that have made significant contributions to the broad patterns of our history.**

The eligibility of Reservations 105 and 378 under Criterion A was previously established in the 1997 L'Enfant Plan nomination and the Virginia Avenue CLI. Reservations 105 and 378 do not meet Criterion A for any other historic contexts either as a contributing resource to a district or as an individually eligible property.

*Criterion B: Properties that are associated with the lives or persons significant in our past.*

The eligibility of Reservations 105 and 378 under Criterion B was previously established in the 1997 L'Enfant Plan nomination and the Virginia Avenue CLI. Reservations 105 and 378 do not individually meet Criterion B as they do not possess significance as a resource associated with the lives of persons significant in our past. While the 1997 L'Enfant Plan nomination was nominated under Criterion B for its association with Pierre Charles L'Enfant, National Register guidance for Criterion B indicates “Architects, artisans, artists, and engineers are often represented by their works, which are eligible under Criterion C. Their homes and studios, however, can be eligible for consideration under Criterion B, because these usually are the properties with which they are most personally associated.”<sup>49</sup> Therefore the property’s association with landscape architects Oehme, van Sweden does not merit historic significance under Criterion B.

#### **Criterion C: Properties that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possesses high artistic values, or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.**

Reservations 105 and 378 were previously determined eligible under Criterion C as contributing resources to L'Enfant’s plan for the City of Washington, DC, and as contributing resources to the Virginia Avenue Cultural Landscape for their local modernist expression of landscape design.

Reservations 105 and 378 are significant at the national level under Criterion C as the work of a master, namely, as the first public example of the New American Garden style of landscape design pioneered by landscape architects Wolfgang Oehme and James van Sweden. Although Oehme, van Sweden incorporated elements from George Patton’s earlier landscape design, especially hardscapes and small-scale features, the massive planting beds with swaths of native

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<sup>49</sup> “How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation,” National Register Bulletin 15, Revised 1997, 16.

grasses and perennials became the signature of their New American Garden. The Martin Building design represented an important transition in Oehme, van Sweden's evolution from the formal geometric rigidity of traditional modernist landscapes to a more informal, post-modern, plant-dominated style that celebrated seasonality and local conditions. The Martin Building site was the firm's first significant public commission and brought them to national attention. The New American Garden, as exemplified in the Martin Building site and disseminated through the firm's body of work and publications in the following decades, influenced landscape design, particularly residential gardens, across the nation.

**Criterion D: properties that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.**

The property has not been previously evaluated under Criterion D. The construction of the subsurface garage over which Reservation 378 was built entailed extensive excavation and shoring of the site. It is unlikely that there is any remaining archaeological potential due to this previous ground disturbance.

**Period of Significance**

The period of significance for the Oehme, van Sweden design is 1977-1978, encompassing the period of the garden's design and execution.

**Criteria Consideration G**

The property satisfies Criteria Consideration G for properties less than fifty years old as an exceptional and highly intact example of Oehme, van Sweden's first public expression of the New American Garden style of landscape design. Landscape architects and historians have identified the Federal Reserve garden as a highly significant transitional design in the firm's body of work and influential in the evolution of landscape design in the United States. The design has been cited by, among others, Charles Birnbaum, FASLA and president of The Cultural Landscape Foundation, who stated that it was the "hinge point" that showed how the New American Garden aesthetic could be scaled up in a civic setting." The garden was featured in a 2015 exhibition at the National Building Museum (NBM) in Washington, DC, of Oehme, van Sweden's New American Garden approach, the largest monographic landscape architecture exhibition in the NBM's history.<sup>50</sup> The Federal Reserve garden has been cited as a pivotal first commission in the new style by *Landscape Architecture Magazine*.<sup>51</sup> Jane Berger, writing in *The American Gardener*, notes that "The Federal Reserve garden was a radical departure for tradition-minded Washington..." and cited Oehme and van Sweden's lunchtime lecture in the garden as "the pair's first encounter with an adoring public entranced by their gardening and design concepts."<sup>52</sup> Ann Slovak Anderson, reviewing the National Building Museum's exhibition of Oehme, van Sweden's New American Garden work in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* noted that "Traditional garden design in the Mid-Atlantic states was

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<sup>50</sup> Jared Green, "The Enduring Appeal of Oehme, van Sweden's New American Garden," *The Dirt*, 15 October 2015, accessed 29 May 2020 at <https://dirt.asla.org/2015/10/15/the-enduring-appeal-of-oehme-van-swedens-new-american-garden/>.

<sup>51</sup> Andrea Oppenheimer Dean, "Men for All Seasons," *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, Volume 87, No. 7 (July 1997), 77.

<sup>52</sup> Jane Berger, "James van Sweden and the New American Garden," *The American Gardener*, Volume 88, No. 5 (September/October 2009), 36-37.

fundamentally challenged in the late twentieth century with the work of the Washington, D.C.–based firm Oehme, van Sweden...” and that the Federal Reserve’s “public garden was revolutionary; planted with thousands of species of *Miscanthus*, *Calamagrostis*, *Rudbeckia*, and many other naturalistic genera. The garden was still a sensation ten years later...”<sup>53</sup>

### **Integrity**

The property demonstrates integrity as a designed landscape by landscape architects Oehme, van Sweden that incorporated elements of a previous Modernist design by George Patton, set on a public reservation created as a result of the principles established in L’Enfant’s 1791-92 plan for the city of Washington, DC. Reservations 105 and 378 are small public green spaces created by the imposition of an orthogonal grid over radial avenues: in this case Virginia Avenue, one of the original radial avenues identified by L’Enfant and lined with parks and parklets. While the boundaries of Reservations 105 and 378 altered over time, they were established in their present form by 1969, prior to Patton’s landscape design. Reservations 105 and 378, which were developed as parks in the 1950s and 1970s, respectively, were established to function as public green spaces within the dense urban fabric of Washington, DC. They are defined, as they were in the period of significance, by the adjoining street grid, major government buildings, and Reservation 106 (Triangle [San Martin Statue] Park) on the north side of Virginia Avenue and by the views framed by street trees along Virginia Avenue. The reservations therefore retain integrity of **location** and **setting**.

The hardscape elements of the site’s design, originally established by George Patton and modified by Oehme, van Sweden, remain in place. These include the major asymmetrical elements of sunken tennis court, fountain, and large open lawn space that balance each other across the site, the granite beds that frame the fountain, tennis court, and north garage entrance, and the orthogonal pattern of walks. Oehme, van Sweden overlaid meandering circulation routes and earthen berms to enclose and frame sheltered niches that contrast with the large open spaces and planted the garden with sweeping masses of flowers and grasses as well as shade trees set within groundcovers. Both Patton and Oehme, van Sweden maintained the small triangular space at the northwest tip of Reservation 105 containing the Discobolus statue set within a lawn area surrounded by sidewalks. Minor alterations to the design for security purposes after the period of significance, including the installation of walls, bollards, and planters, have slightly impacted the original design, but these alterations were carried out by Oehme, van Sweden and designed to be compatible with the historic character of the original design. The reservations therefore retain integrity of **design**.

The materials and workmanship of both Patton and Oehme, van Sweden’s design remain largely intact. These include Patton’s smooth cut granite planting beds and fountain and the metal lamp posts, Oehme, van Sweden’s earthen berms, and the exposed aggregate concrete walks (interior circulation) and smooth concrete walks (perimeter circulation). Surviving from Patton’s design are a series of magnolia trees. The planting materials added by Oehme, van Sweden generally remain in place. In some locations, the lack of original plant material in the quantities and variety of species that was intended has slightly impacted the aspects of materials and workmanship. However, the main textural features—sweeping masses of flowers and grasses, shade trees, and

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<sup>53</sup> Ann Slovak Anderson, “The New American Garden: The Landscape Architecture of Oehme, van Sweden (Exhibition),” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Volume 75, No. 4 (December 2016), 508-509.

groundcovers—are intact. The bronze Discobolus statue on its stone column is also original. New materials including metal fencing and bollards have been added; however, these elements were designed to be compatible with the historic character of the original materials. The reservations therefore retain integrity of **materials and workmanship**.

The integrity of the site’s location, setting, design, materials, and workmanship collectively serve to convey its historic character as a public green space designed for rest and respite from the bustle of urban work and life. Rotating sculpture installations and the changing nature of the planting materials support enduring use of the site. The integrity of Oehme, van Sweden’s design and plantings creates a strong association with its character as the firm’s first significant public commission and a highly influential example of the New American Garden movement. The trees, flowers, and grasses continue to provide a pleasant location for rest and escaping the city. The property continues its association with the beginning of the New American Garden movement and retains integrity of feeling as a vibrant, colorful, attractive place to visit. The reservations therefore retain integrity of **feeling and association**.

### Contributing Features

The table below identifies contributing (C) and noncontributing (NC) features throughout the site. Features are organized by landscape characteristic to match the narrative description. The associated period of significance identifies when the contributing features were first established in relation to the periods of significance identified in the evaluation of significance.

While the kiosks and north garage ramp date from the period of significance, they are not significant elements of the landscape design for which the property is determined eligible. They have therefore been evaluated as noncontributing.

Feature		C/NC	Associated Period of Significance			
			1791-92	1899-1912	1950-1977	1977-78
Topography and Spatial Organization	Triangular public green space created by the imposition of an orthogonal grid over radial avenues	C	*			
	Asymmetrical layout of major geometric elements: rectangular tennis court, large oval fountain, triangular park, polygonal central lawn.	C			*	
	Sharp angles to meet orientation of Virginia Avenue	C			*	
	Asymmetrical spaces along Virginia Avenue defined by earthen berms to create shaded seating niches contrasting with open lawn	C				*
	Raised beds framing walkways and surrounding the tennis court, fountain, and north garage entrance	C				*

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Circulation	Perimeter sidewalks along Virginia Avenue and 21st Street NW	C			*	
	Pattern of orthogonal walks	C			*	
	Meandering walks leading to shaded seating areas	C				*
	North garage entrance ramp	NC				
Views	Vista along Virginia Avenue framing the Washington Monument	C		*		
	Views of the Martin Building from the fountain and central lawn	C			*	
	Interior views between park areas and features framed by mass plantings	C				*
Vegetation	Street trees lining Virginia Avenue	C		*		
	Extant vegetation from George E. Patton's design: southern magnolias ( <i>Magnolia grandiflora</i> )	C			*	
	Mass plantings of native grasses and perennials on earthen berms and within raised granite planting beds	C				*
	Shade and ornamental trees set within ground covers	C				*
Buildings & Structures	Entrance kiosk	NC				
	Egress kiosk	NC				
	Security guard booth	NC				
Constructed Water Features	Robert Latham Owen Memorial Fountain	C			*	
Small-Scale Features	Tennis court	C			*	
	Lamp posts	C			*	
	Granite raised beds	C			*	
	Discus Thrower (Discobolus) statue	C			*	
	Granite wall at the northeast edge of Virginia Avenue	NC				
	Metal security fences	NC				
	Composite wood benches	NC				
	Concrete drinking fountains	NC				
	Bollards	NC				
Security gates and barricades	NC					

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**PREPARER'S DETERMINATION**

Eligibility Recommended

Eligibility Not Recommended

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A  B  C  D

Applicable Considerations:

A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Prepared By: Ruth Mills, Senior Historian  
Shelby Scharen, ASLA, Historical Landscape Architect  
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2121 Ward Place, NW, 4th Floor  
Washington, DC 20037

Date: May 4, 2021

**DC SHPO REVIEW AND COMMENTS**

Concurs with Recommendation

Does Not Concur with Recommendation

David Maloney  
District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer

Date:

Reviewed by:  
DC Government Project/Permit Project Log Number:

Continue text here.

When complete, please return the draft Determination of Effect Form to the DC SHPO **IN MICROSOFT WORD FORMAT** for review and comment. Electronic submittals are encouraged. If the file is too large to submit via regular email, please submit it using the "drop box" indicated below or mail the file on a compact disc.

Return to:

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