

AIA 1900 • PRESENT

AIA AND THE PLAN OF THE NATION'S CAPITAL HISTORICAL SYMMETRY 1900 • PRESENT

1. GETTING INTERESTED IN THE MALL

As the year 1900 approached, architects saw the opportunity to help celebrate the Centennial of the Nation's Capital by developing design ideas for improving the city. The National AIA convention was to be held in Washington late in the year. That event would be the time to build a broad base of civic interest in the Mall.

2. ENTER ARCHITECT GLENN BROWN

One person had studied the Mall for several years and had a clear picture of how the Mall could be restored. Architect Glenn Brown, secretary of the Washington chapter of AIA, realized that the answer was to return to the elements of the original 1791 L'Enfant Plan. Brown lobbied for the 1900 convention to be held in Washington where visitors could see, in person, the overgrown and chaotic condition of the Mall. He organized a series of presentations by architects to open discussion of a variety of ideas. Brown led the way and brought the architectural profession with him.

3. GAINING CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT

Without Congressional support, nothing could get done. In 1901, a newly organized AIA Committee on Legislation met with Senator John McMillan of Michigan, chairman of the Senate District of Columbia Committee. McMillan was interested in clearing the Mall as well as developing the park system of Washington. He secured the passage of a Senate Resolution that created the Senate Park Commission, also known as the McMillan Commission. McMillan's Staff Director, Charles Moore, suggested that Chicago architect Daniel Burnham head the team. Burnham chose Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., New York architect Charles McKim, and sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens. Under Burnham's leadership the McMillan Commission took the broad concept of the Parks resolution and turned it into a complete master plan for the restoration of the National Mall.

4. THE TEAM BEGINS ITS WORK

Burnham focused on relocating the railroad while the others worked out how to incorporate the new landfill west of the Washington Monument into an expanded, unified design. The railroad owners agreed to Burnham's proposal to relocate the terminal to a site north of the Mall, thus opening the full sweep of the Mall from the Capitol to the Washington Monument as intended in L'Enfant's original vision. The new plan reinforced and expanded L'Enfant's concept of the symbolic cross axis: the Capitol east-west axis was extended westward to the Lincoln Memorial; the White House north-south axis continued onto recreational fields and to another major monument. The design team emphasized the importance of the iconic Washington Monument to the design. The great obelisk, no longer situated on the river bank, was to be the new centerpiece and "gem of the Mall system."

5. SELLING AND IMPLEMENTING THE DESIGN

The key to success was winning the support of the President, Congress, and the national public. Artists were selected to prepare large color renderings of the design proposals. President McKinley, his Cabinet, leaders of the Congress, and the general public were invited to view the designs on display at the Corcoran Gallery of Art. AIA's ongoing advocacy in ensuing decades ensured that the McMillan Plan was followed. In the decade following the 1900 National AIA meeting, the National Convention was held in Washington six times. Daniel Burnham was appointed chairman of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, the body created to provide aesthetic advice on Washington architecture, and served from its formation in 1910 until 1912. Charles Moore chaired Fine Arts from 1915 to 1937. Olmsted also served on Fine Arts from 1910 to 1918.

6. PLANNING FOR THE 3RD CENTURY

Today there is a need for a new Visionary Plan for the Mall in its 3rd Century – and a new McMillan Commission to create that Plan. This Plan will rise above the fragmented, jurisdiction-based current plans and ad-hoc development with a comprehensive plan for the entire Mall as a unified design and symbolic whole. The Plan can expand the Mall once again to provide new sites for future memorials, recreational areas, and other public uses. It can complete unfinished areas such as the Washington Monument grounds. It can address the Mall's long-term sustainability needs.

**AIA ONCE AGAIN HAS AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY.
AIA CAN HELP FORM A NEW McMILLAN COMMISSION
TO CREATE THE 3RD CENTURY MALL.**

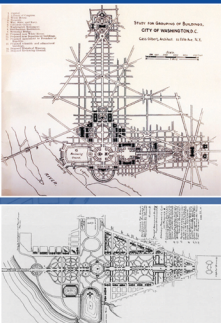
The Mall in 1892 cluttered with buildings, trees, and the railroad. *Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs*



The Mall in 2006. *Courtesy of Carol Highsmith*



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE AIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE NATIONAL MALL IN 1900 AND OPPORTUNITIES TO LEAD THE WAY AGAIN IN THE 21ST CENTURY



Glenn Brown prepared a new civil plan. Cass Gilbert proposed (top) moving the White House farther north on 16th Street. Paper relating to the improvement of the City of Washington, Senate Document No. 546, 56th Congress, 2nd Session, 1901.



Senator McMillan



Charles Moore



Daniel Burnham



Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.



1901 McMillan Plan showing original Potomac River shoreline. *Courtesy of U.S. Commission of Fine Arts*



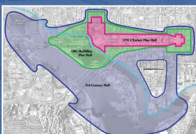
Bird's-eye view of the McMillan Plan by Francis L. V. Hoppin, 1902. *Courtesy of U.S. Commission of Fine Arts*



McMillan concepts for the Lincoln Memorial, Union Square, and Washington Monument. *Courtesy of U.S. Commission of Fine Arts*



A new plan can complete the unfinished Washington Monument grounds and resolve flooding threats.



The Mall can be expanded again onto contiguous federal land including the hundreds of acres of East Potomac Park.

