

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: U.S. Department of Agriculture Administration Building (Boundary Increase and Additional Documentation)

Other names/site number: Jamie L. Whitten Federal Building

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 12th Street and Jefferson Drive, S.W.

City or town: Washington State: District of Columbia County: _____

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide ___ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___ A ___ B ___ C ___ D

| | |
|--|-------------|
| <hr/> Signature of certifying official/Title: | Date |
| <hr/> State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government | |

| | |
|---|-------------|
| In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria. | |
| <hr/> Signature of commenting official: | Date |
| <hr/> Title : | |
| State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government | |

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| <u>2</u> | _____ | buildings |
| <u>1</u> | _____ | sites |
| _____ | _____ | structures |
| _____ | _____ | objects |
| <u>3</u> | _____ | Total |

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 3

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT/government office

AGRICULTURE/horticultural facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT/government office

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/Beaux Arts

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: Granite

Walls: Marble and Brick

Roof: Composite Membrane and Gravel; Terra Cotta Tile

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Administration Building is located at Twelfth Street and Jefferson Drive, S.W. (1400 Jefferson Drive, S.W.), in Washington, D.C. The building is composed of a central, five-story block flanked by four-story, L-shaped wings. An additional basement story is partially revealed through areaways with sloped berms that encircle the structure. Designed in the Beaux Arts style, the Administration Building is clad in white marble and features a dodecastyle Roman Corinthian portico on the center block. The property encompasses the entirety of the square bound by Jefferson Drive, Independence Avenue, and Twelfth and Fourteenth streets, S.W. In 1995, the building was renamed in honor of Jamie L. Whitten, a long-serving member of Congress and chairman of the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee. The Whitten Building was the product of two major building campaigns: the outer wings were designed by the Philadelphia firm Rankin, Kellogg & Crane and constructed in 1904-1908; the center block was designed by Rankin & Kellogg (after Crane left the firm in 1925) and constructed in 1928-1930. In 1936, two bridges were constructed to connect the Whitten Building with the USDA South Building across Independence Avenue. The building has undergone few changes since 1936 and has retained a high degree of historic integrity.

Narrative Description

General Description

The Whitten Building is composed of an eleven-bay center block flanked by two nineteen-bay, L-shaped wings connected by narrow, three-bay hyphens. Symmetrical about its north-south axis, the building is long and narrow with a footprint that roughly approximates an elongated E. The building is clad in honed white marble and buff brick and varies between four and six stories, including a rusticated ground story, a recessed attic story, and a partially exposed basement story. Facing Jefferson Drive, the center block's north façade features a shallow, dodecastyle portico in the colossal Roman Corinthian order. Four secondary, tetrastyle, pedimented porticoes flank the central one to the east and west.

The property on which the Whitten Building is located comprises a portion of Reservation No. 2, established by the L'Enfant Plan. The parcel is generously proportioned with large setbacks on the north, east, and west sides. The north lawn faces the National Mall (also known as "the Mall") and features mature trees and a central entry court and drive. The east and west sides

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feature a mix of trees, lawns, and parking lots. On the south side, the building extends nearly to the property line. The rectangular courtyards formed by the building's L-shaped wings contain paved parking lots. Affixed to the southernmost elevations of the wings are two enclosed, pedestrian bridges that span Independence Avenue and connect the Whitten Building with the USDA South Building (see Figure 1 for site plan).

Site Context

The Whitten Building is located one block south of the National Mall on a site bound by Fourteenth and Twelfth streets (including the Twelfth Street Expressway underpass), Independence Avenue, and Jefferson Drive, S.W. The site encompasses 6.8 acres. The scale and character of buildings around the property vary dramatically, depending on their use and proximity to the Mall. The rear of the building faces the enormous façade of the USDA South Building, which occupies nearly the entirety of its square.¹ Both buildings house offices and other facilities serving the Department, and they are physically linked by two enclosed pedestrian bridges that span Independence Avenue. The east elevation of the Whitten Building faces the Freer Gallery of Art across Twelfth Street. Other buildings in the area are primarily devoted to federal and cultural uses, and reflect a broad period between the late-nineteenth to late-twentieth centuries. In general, they reflect the monumental character of the setting. The Whitten Building's façade sits across Jefferson Drive from the broad expanse of the Mall lawn, shaded along its southern flank by a quadruple row of American elm trees. Across Fourteenth Street, the building faces a grassy knoll planted with informal groupings of trees.

Exterior Description

The Whitten Building was designed as a single scheme but was constructed over two phases. The east and west wings were constructed first, between 1904 and 1908. After a twenty year hiatus from construction, the Department of Agriculture received funding to complete the center block and hyphens between 1928 and 1930. The bridges linking the Whitten Building to the South Building were added in 1936. The Whitten Building bears the hallmark characteristics of the Beaux Arts style, manifested to conform to the vision of the 1902 McMillan Plan.

East and West Wings

The east and west wings were the first portions of the building to be completed. Constructed between 1904 and 1908, they were primarily dedicated to research laboratories. In plan, the wings are L-shaped, with the shorter legs extending south toward Independence Avenue. Each wing has four stories above ground, including a rusticated ground story and a recessed attic story

¹ The South Building contains six interior courtyards that support various uses. Although large in footprint, the courtyards are not visible from the street. The South Building is surrounded by paved parking lots with minimal vegetation and street trees. The entrance to the Smithsonian Metro Station is located in a small notch in the plan of the building at its northeast corner.

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partially concealed behind a balustrade. From the exterior, the wings are nearly identical and symmetrical about the building's center axis. They are clad in white Vermont Marble, cut and coursed in a manner similar to the Georgia marble on the center block. Compared to the latter, the Vermont stone has more variegated coloring between blocks and a less pronounced vein structure. The wings' roofs are hipped and covered in red terra cotta tiles not visible from ground level.

The principal, north façade of each wing is defined by outer pavilions that frame a central, thirteen-bay expanse of wall. Pedimented, tetrastyle porticoes further embellish these pavilions, which project slightly from the surrounding wall surface. Inset within the pediments are allegorical groupings carved in marble by the sculptor A.A. Weinman. The pediment sculptures are composed of two figures flanking a central shield, and from west to east the pediment sculptures represent forests, cereals, flowers, and fruits. The porticoes are detailed and proportioned in the colossal Roman Ionic order. Their columns span the wings' second and third stories, containing three bays of typical windows on each story. The volutes on the column capitals are linked by swags. Extending beyond the portico to encircle the wings and adjacent hyphens, the entablature is composed of a double-banded architrave, a flat frieze, and a denticulated cornice.

From north to south, the wings' outer elevations are composed of three-bay projecting pavilions with engaged, tetrastyle porticoes; recessed, one-bay hyphens; and six-bay expanses of wall. The northern pavilions are similar to those facing Jefferson Drive, but do not project from the wall surface and do not carry triangular pediments. The single bays of the recessed hyphens are centered between pilasters. Windows along the six southernmost bays are set directly within the flat wall surface.

The wings' south and inner elevations face inward on their partially enclosed courtyards. Tetrastyle porticoes grace the elevations closest to the center block, and are ornamented to the same level of detail as those facing Jefferson Drive. From these porticoes, thirteen bays stretch outward to meet the shorter leg of the L-shaped wings, which extend south toward Independence Avenue. The inner face of each wing features a two-bay, full-height, recessed hyphen that connects to a six-bay projection. The southernmost walls of each wing, directly adjacent to Independence Avenue, are pierced at the center by the two-and-a-half-story enclosed arches that connect the Whitten and South Buildings. In place of the Vermont Marble found on the north and outer elevations, the wing elevations facing the south courts are clad in buff brick on the second, third, and fourth stories, laid in a common bond pattern.

Typical window conditions prevail throughout the east and west wings. Those on the ground story feature rounded arched openings similar to those on the center block and hyphens. Those on the second story feature a shouldered architrave, convex frieze, and cornice. Windows above have square architraves and sills supported by square corbels. Windows throughout feature one-over-one, double-hung wood frames painted dark green.

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Center Block

Composed of a three part façade organization, the center block consists of a rusticated ground story; a central, three-story shaft; and an entablature surmounted by an additional attic story. The block is clad in honed Georgia White Cherokee Marble, cut in large blocks and laid in a coursed ashlar pattern. Spanning eleven bays both wide and deep, the block has a hollow central courtyard that provides illumination to the building's interior, covered courtyard.

Defined by a dodecastyle portico in the colossal Roman Corinthian order, the building's principal façade faces north toward the Mall. The giant fluted columns that support the portico rest on short plinths, span the central shaft of the building, and are crowned with elaborate Corinthian capitals. The columns are paired on the outer corners, creating nine interior bays that correspond to vertically ganged windows along the face of the wall. Window bays are divided by flat pilasters and sheltered under the portico, whose projection forms a shallow balcony enclosed with stone balustrades set between the column bases.

Beneath the portico is situated the building's main entry. The ground story is clad in rusticated stone bands, angled around the arched window openings to mimic the appearance of voussoirs. The three central bays are deeply recessed, forming barrel-vaulted openings that house double-leafed doors. Bronze gates with elaborate cresting frame the outer openings, which are flanked by elaborate, crested bronze lanterns mounted on the walls.² The keystone of each of the three central arches features an abstracted cornstalk relief. A stone-clad ramp with bronze railings has been erected leading to the easternmost door. The ramp is a modern addition to the plaza.

Adjacent to the building's entrance to the north is a paved plaza, raised slightly above the circular entry drive by two shallow stairs. Across the surface of the plaza, bands of honed granite inscribe large squares, infilled with fieldstone pavers. Low stone benches line the edge of the plaza, which extends nearly the entire width of the portico. Additional benches are located within each of the shallow recesses formed by the window openings. The plaza was constructed in concert with the Administration Building and was completed in 1930.

The entablature's architrave has triple fascia bands and a carved foot molding. The frieze is flat, except along the north portico, where it is embellished with rosettes set in square blocks that correspond to the paired columns below and inscribed UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE. The cornice features a dentil course, a modillion course with an egg-and-dart modillion molding, and a crown molding. The entablature extends beyond the portico to encircle the entirety of the center block, dividing the building's central shaft from the fifth, attic story. The fifth story is fenestrated to correspond to the window groupings below, with the exception of the north façade, where it projects to crown the north portico. The fifth story parapet is terminated in a projecting crown molding. The face of the attic itself is divided into three panels bearing the following inscriptions:

² The lanterns are replicas of those found on the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence.

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THE HUSBANDMAN THAT LABORETH
MUST BE FIRST PARTAKER
OF THE FRUITS—SAINT PAUL

NOT OTHER HUMAN OCCUPATION OPENS SO WIDE A FIELD FOR
THE PROFITABLE AND AGREEABLE COMBINATION OF LABOR
WITH CULTIVATED THOUGHT AS AGRICULTURE—LINCOLN

WITH REFERENCE EITHER TO INDIVIDUAL
OR NATIONAL WELFARE AGRICULTURE IS OF
PRIMARY IMPORTANCE—WASHINGTON

Fenestration patterns are typical throughout the center block. The first story windows are arched, with inset openings and voussoirs that radiate outward to meet the rusticated stone banding. Windows in these openings are similarly arched, with paired single-paned casement frames, surrounded by sidelights and arched transoms. Windows on the second, third, and fourth stories are vertically ganged into a shallow recess, which extends between the ground story belt course and the lower edge of the entablature. Within the recess, a mock entablature, supported on engaged corner pilasters, divides the second and third stories from the fourth. The entablature has an architrave with double fascia bands, a flat frieze, and a band of Greek frets in place of a cornice. Beneath the entablature, the second and third stories each have a single window containing paired two-paned casement sashes surmounted by a four-paned, fixed transom. These windows are divided by a fluted spandrel panel with a round medallion at its center.³ Directly above the fluted panels are additional rows of spandrels infilled with polished granite. Above the entablature, the windows on the fourth story are paired, four-paned, casement sashes divided by a stone mullion. Windows on the building's fifth story match the configuration of those on the fourth, but have no recess or otherwise articulated surround. Windows and spandrels throughout the center block are painted steel. Windows on the nine center bays of the north and south elevations diverge slightly from the typical condition. On the fourth story, there are single window openings instead of paired.

The center block's south elevation mirrors the configuration of the north façade, albeit without the projecting portico and balcony. The ground story replicates the configuration of the north elevation: nine arched openings set within a field of rusticated bands. Within the central shaft, twelve engaged pilasters, paired on the outer bays, frame nine interior bays of vertically ganged windows that replicate the typical window conditions found on the north elevation. Here, the ground story only supports a single opening, which leads to a bridge connecting to the Independence Avenue sidewalk. A curved driveway—lined with a stone and metal balustrade—slopes downward under this bridge to connect Independence Avenue with the building's basement story.

³ The windows at the second story of the façade differ from the majority of the windows in that one casement is capped by a single-light fixed transom and the other is topped by a paired casement or sliding frame transom.

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The building's interior courtyard is clad in buff brick. Apart from several brick belt courses, it features no applied architectural ornamentation. The courtyard is seven bays wide and four bays deep. Windows on the third, fourth, and fifth stories look out upon a curved skylight that encloses the building's interior courtyard. The roof of the center block is flat. Four enclosed penthouses extend an additional story above the roof and are not visible from street level.

Hyphens

The hyphens, which were constructed in conjunction with the center block, span three bays wide and one bay deep to connect the center block with the east and west wings. Four stories tall, the hyphens follow the same general organization established by the center block: a rusticated ground story with arched openings; a central shaft with two stories of one-over-one, double-hung windows; and an attic story composed of a denticulated entablature, short attic story with small, rectangular window openings, and a balustrade relief engaged with the raised parapet. On the north and south elevations of the hyphens' ground story, double-leaf glass doors with upper transoms replace the central windows.

Areaways and Basement Story

The Whitten Building is encircled by a network of areaways, which are supported by retaining walls and steep earthen berms. The areaways achieve a dual purpose: allowing daylight into the building's basement story while simultaneously reducing the perceived height of the building from its surrounding streets and the National Mall. The areaways line the east and west elevations of the center block, where they are concealed from view by vegetation and a cast-iron pipe railing. The areaways are more apparent around the east and west wings, which they encircle, with the exception of the short south elevations immediately abutting Independence Avenue. The sloped berms are planted with a mix of deciduous groundcover, predominantly ivy.

The building's basement story matches the fenestration patterns of the stories above. It is clad in massive blocks of gray Massachusetts granite, laid in an ashlar pattern with flush joints. The base of the areaways support a narrow drainage channel paved with concrete. Window openings are square cut and deeply recessed into the face of the wall. Windows on the basement story feature one-over-one, double-hung wood frames. On the northeastern and northwestern corners of the building, concrete stairs connect the base of the areaways and the ground level. Doorways at these points offer access to the interior of the building. The openings are accentuated with bronze lanterns mounted on either side of the doors.

Landscape and Additional Buildings

The placement of the Whitten Building on its site creates a distinct progression of spaces, both in use and character. The building's deep setback along its northern property line (varying between seventy and one hundred feet) allows for generously proportioned lawns, which are divided into

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equal eastern and western halves by a ceremonial entry court and circular drive. Flanking the drive on either side are paved, L-shaped walks that connect the sidewalk to a plaza directly in front of the building's center block. Spurs from these walks connect them to the doors on the hyphens. The lawns are interspersed with mature trees, memorials, and other scattered vegetation. The memorials, which take the form of bronze plaques mounted on stone blocks or stands, are concentrated in the north lawn. They date from the 1980s-2000s and commemorate persons and events important in USDA and national history.

The entry court, which provides both pedestrian and automobile access to the north Whitten Building entrance, is the point of entry for the visitor center and for prominent officials, connecting directly with the paved stone plaza extending outward from the Whitten Building. From Jefferson Drive, curving driveways sweep into a lower plaza, paved in asphalt and used for automobile parking. Direct pedestrian access between the sidewalk and the lower plaza is provided by twin sets of concrete stairs with low coping. These stairs negotiate a minor change in grade, creating a sloped berm contained within the two semicircular drives. The berm is partially lined at the top with a low stone wall.

The western portion of the site faces Fourteenth Street. It is connected to the north lawns via a shaded knoll. Similar to the areaway berms, the knoll is planted with English Ivy. A curved, concrete path connects the sidewalk on the northern side to a parking lot on the western side of the building. The double-loaded parking lot features angled spaces, with an ingress drive on the southern side and an egress drive on the western. The lot is shaded from the Fourteenth Street viewshed by a row of trees and flowering shrubs. The lot is further separated from the sidewalk by a narrow lawn.

At the northeast corner of the site is an organic garden. The garden has a loosely organized, wedge-shaped configuration. Paths laid with pea gravel radiate from a circular node at the site's extreme northeastern corner. The earthen and mulch plots are interspersed with raised planting beds. To the immediate south is a large parking lot with three tiers of double-loaded rows. The parking lot extends almost to the edge of the site—nearly meeting both Twelfth Street and Independence Avenue—and is only divided from the sidewalk by narrow, curbed enclosures with scattered plantings. The enclosed elevator structure for the Smithsonian Metro Station is also located at the southeastern corner of the site, adjacent to the parking lot.

The wings' south elevations directly abut the Independence Avenue sidewalk, creating two interior courts on this elevation, both of which are enclosed on three sides. The east and west courts on this side are predominantly asphalt paved and contain parking lots. There are two distinct parking lots on the west court and a single, wide expanse of asphalt on the east court.

The area around the center block and its connecting hyphens is more decoratively landscaped than the parking lots on the east and west courts. A sloping, semi-circular drive connects the ground-story sidewalk with the basement level of the building's center block. Stone piers linked

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with cast-iron railing frame this drive. On either side of the linear walks leading from the sidewalk to the hyphen, entrances are planted with shrubs and flowering plants.

Mechanical and Alcohol Buildings

There are two additional, freestanding buildings located on the Whitten Building property. Both are located in the south parking lots. In the western parking lot, the Mechanical Building is an L-shaped building located predominantly below ground. It extends one story above grade and is clad in marble ashlar with prominent quoining on the south side and corners (facing Independence Avenue) and stucco on the north side. The building also features several punched window openings and a flat roof concealed behind a parapet. The Mechanical Building was completed circa 1936 to house mechanical and cooling equipment for the Whitten Building; it replaced a former freestanding power plant located on this site.

Located at the northeast corner of the eastern parking lot, the Alcohol Building is a small, one-story building nestled within the areaway's planted berms. It is clad in brick and has a flat roof concealed behind a simple cornice and parapet. Punched openings face the areaway on the north and east elevations. Historic photographs date the construction of the Alcohol Building to between 1920 and 1923. The name of the Alcohol Building was reportedly derived from its use to store ethanol. The volatility and flammability of ethanol would explain the need to store it outside the main laboratory wings, although other chemicals were likely stored in the building as well.

Since their completion, vegetated green roof systems have been installed on the roofs of both buildings. They otherwise retain a high degree of integrity and are contributing resources to the property.

Wilson and Knapp Memorial Arches

Two pedestrian bridges span over Independence Avenue and connect the second stories of the Whitten and South Buildings. They were added in 1936 to connect the two buildings, as the latter was nearing completion. The bridges are defined by graceful, single-span segmented arches clad on their inner face with buff Guastavino terra cotta tiles laid in a herringbone pattern.⁴ Each exposed bridge face is symmetrical and features blind outer walls clad in honed limestone laid in a coursed ashlar pattern. Each wall features a stepped parapet highlighted with a frieze composed of Greek key patterns alternating with short, fluted shafts. Beneath this frieze and near the outer corner of each bridge face is a raised medallion featuring an eagle encircled by a ring of Greek waves. At their north and south edges, the bridge spans descend to meet small,

⁴ The structural system of the bridges is unknown. Given their long span and slender profile, however, it is likely that the bridges have a steel truss structure with a masonry veneer. Steel was used as a structural material in both the Administration Building Center Block as well as the USDA South Building. The arched appearance of the bridges is therefore likely decorative.

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arched openings providing access to recessed vestibules. The bridges connect with the Whitten Building on the center of the wings' south elevations.

Interior Description

The interior of the Whitten Building contains approximately 300,000 gross square feet, with about 190,000 square feet of net space useable for offices and other work areas, divided evenly between the center block and the wings. The various parts are united by a long corridor, which spans the longitudinal axis of the building, connecting the wings, hyphens, and center block.

East and West Wings

In plan, the wings are organized into double-loaded corridors that connect perimeter offices. As originally constructed, the perimeter rooms featured two doors facing the corridors (spaced to correspond to the placement of the exterior windows) as well as doors that communicate with each of the adjacent offices. As constructed, the wings contained twenty-six rooms on each floor devoted to offices or laboratories. A mechanical and circulation core (containing lavatories, elevators, stairs, utility closets, and vent shafts) comprised the southern half of each of the outer pavilions. The plan of the fourth (attic) story was slightly smaller in footprint, its walls being recessed slightly from the face of the lower walls. The wings are relatively spartan in finish, with plaster walls, suspended acoustic tile ceilings, glazed brick tile floors or maple plank floors, and wood doors with triple-light upper transoms.

Center Block

The center block is composed of a single-loaded corridor that encircles a central courtyard. The courtyard is located nearer the south elevation of the block to accommodate a double set of lobbies on the northern side. These lobbies connect with the main arterial corridor that transects the building, extending to meet the corridors in the hyphens as well as those in the wings. The corridor encircling the center court is groin vaulted on the first and second stories; otherwise, the corridor ceilings are flat. The floors of these two lobbies and the central corridor are laid with polished marble and travertine tiles. The first entrance lobby is three bays wide, to correspond to the exterior doors. Openings on all sides are arched. The lobby features classical detailing, a coffered ceiling, and a high wainscot of Dolomite marble, which extends to the second lobby and groin-vaulted corridor spaces. The second lobby repeats the pattern of arched openings, coffered ceilings, and classical detailing. Here, the arched bays are framed with Corinthian pilasters. Two of the bays on the western wall are enclosed and feature bronze elevator doors and surrounds. The bays on the eastern wall lead to a recessed, apsidal opening that harbors a graceful, curved staircase. Spanning the entire upper wall surface of the apse is a large oil-on-canvas mural painted by the artist (Thomas) Gilbert White in 1934. The mural is a classically idealized representation of farming and is titled after a quote drawn from Virgil's *Georgics*, "O fortunates Nimium, Sua si bona norit, Agricolas."

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Near the center of the building is a skylighted atrium or courtyard.⁵ Designed to resemble the interior court of an Italian Palazzo, the courtyard is arcaded on the first and second stories with a circular marble fountain at its center. The court is twelve bays wide and six bays deep, its walls clad in mottled brown brick and accented with limestone and terra cotta details.⁶ Openings on the second floor are lined with terra cotta balustrades. On the outer bay of each wall, the balustrade projects slightly to form a Juliet balcony. The court is illuminated above by a skylight, whose curved shape suggests that of a barrel vault. The skylight is supported by curved steel trusses anchored to the north and south walls. The floor of the courtyard is depressed slightly from the surrounding corridor. The floor of the court is laid with slate flagstone pavers. On the centermost bay of the western wall, the arch is filled with a World War I bas relief memorial, crafted in marble by the sculptor John Flanagan and installed in 1931.

Alterations

Although they retain generally high integrity, both the building and site have undergone several alterations beyond the period of significance. On the exterior, the planting has generally matured and been expanded with new, diverse vegetation introduced and older vegetation removed. Much of this is concentrated along the northern portion of the site, including extensive screening planting around the west parking lot and the circa 2011 organic garden at the northeast corner of the site. Some of the new trees in the north lawn are commemorative in nature and are accompanied by small paved walks and memorial plaques. The large parking lots on the east and west sides of the site were also later additions, made during the 1970s and 1980s. Paving in the south courts has been expanded over time, although those areas have retained their utilitarian character. Other minor changes have been introduced to aid or moderate access to the site, including the accessible ramp on the north plaza, the Metro elevator on the southeast corner, and the concrete planting beds along Independence Avenue.

On the exterior, the Whitten Building retains a high degree of integrity and has been minimally altered over time. The interior has been more extensively altered, particularly as the original laboratory wings were converted to offices. Although the general floor plan was retained, finishes and features have been replaced. A modernization and restoration of the building was completed in the early 1990s that included cosmetic and mechanical upgrades, as well as various other changes. Lighting fixtures in the corridors and offices were replaced and suspended acoustic ceiling tiles installed, predominantly in the offices. The interior public spaces, including the central lobby, corridors, monumental stairs, and courtyard, are more intact. The courtyard skylight has also been restored to replicate its original appearance.

⁵ Called the court or courtyard in historic drawings, this space is today commonly referred to as the patio.

⁶ The bay configuration in the interior of the courtyard does not correspond to that on the exterior walls above.

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Contributing Resources

| Resource Name | Resource Type | # of New Resources | # of Previously Listed Resources |
|---|----------------------|---------------------------|---|
| USDA Administration Building (Whitten Building) (includes two attached bridges and north plaza) | Building | 0 | 1 |
| Olmsted Landscape | Site | 1 | 0 |
| Alcohol Building | Building | 1 | 0 |
| Mechanical Building | Building | 1 | 0 |
| | Total | 3 | 1 |

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Agriculture

Architecture

Community Planning & Development

Landscape Architecture

Politics/Government

Period of Significance

1904-1936

Significant Dates

1904-1908

1928-1930

1936

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Rankin, Kellogg & Crane

Rankin & Kellogg (after 1925)

Olmsted Brothers

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Administration (Whitten) Building is nationally significant under National Register Criteria A and C. It is significant under Criterion A for its association with the Department of Agriculture, which emerged from a dramatic period of growth in the first four decades of the twentieth century to become one of the nation's most influential and far-reaching federal agencies. By virtue of the Department's influence and longevity of development on the site, the Whitten Building is the only building facing the National Mall to house the headquarters of a Cabinet-level agency. The property is also significant under Criterion A as one of the earliest buildings whose style and siting conformed to the recommendations of the 1902 Senate Park Commission Plan (generally referred to as the McMillan Plan). The plan sought to promote the principles of the L'Enfant Plan and the City

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Beautiful movement in Washington, specifically around the capital's monumental core. With major and lasting impacts for the development of Washington throughout the twentieth century, the McMillan Plan resonated throughout the country as cities sought to develop civic and cultural centers. As a work of architecture, the Whitten Building is a monumental example of the Beaux Arts style in the District of Columbia, and it served as a model for the development of later federal buildings in Washington. Finally, the resource is significant under Criterion C as a work of landscape architecture, for its association with the prominent Olmsted Brothers firm, who tailored the site's planting to complement their greater visions for the National Mall and its environs. The period of significance, 1904-1936, covers the building's period of development and includes the construction of all contributing resources.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

National Register Amendment and Boundary Increase

National Register documentation for the Whitten Building was completed in 1973 and the property was listed in the National Register in 1974. The nomination did not call out the National Register criteria under which the property was listed, but its statement of significance suggested that the building met Criteria A and C. The property qualified as a significant work of architecture (Criterion C) for the quality of its Beaux Arts design and for its integration of decorative sculpture and painting. It also qualified for its representation of broad patterns of urban development in Washington, D.C. (Criterion A), specifically as an early respondent to the McMillan Plan for the National Mall. Further, the National Register nomination form stated that the Whitten Building was an early model for the neoclassical departmental headquarters that would proliferate throughout Washington during the early twentieth century.

The purpose of this National Register amendment is to provide an expanded narrative for the development of the Whitten Building and its history within the greater framework of the development of Washington, D.C. In addition to an expanded historic context, this nomination provides the following: reiteration of the arguments of significance listed above; expansion of the contributing resources to include the Olmsted-designed landscape and two additional contributing buildings; expansion of the areas of significance to include arguments for Agriculture (Criterion A) and Landscape Architecture (Criterion C); and an updated assessment of integrity.⁷

⁷ The Whitten Building landscape has been determined eligible for National Register listing as a contributing component to the overall resource. Bill Marzella, Determination of Eligibility Form, "United States Department of Agriculture Administration Building & Landscape," DC State Historic Preservation Office, Washington, D.C., signed October 2, 2013.

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This amendment also provides a more detailed tabulation of the acreage of the Whitten Building property. Although the acreage has increased, the physical boundaries of the site have not changed from the original nomination.

NARRATIVE HISTORY

History of the Department of Agriculture, 1839-1945

Since the early seventeenth century, the foundation of the American economy had been built upon agriculture. Tobacco, British North America's first successful export crop, significantly drove commercial growth as well as colonial settlement. At the time of the American Revolution, an estimated ninety percent of the population lived on farms and were dependent on farming for their livelihood. Recognizing that national prosperity was in no small part dependent on the success of its farmers, the U.S. Congress sought to establish a mechanism for agricultural training, research, and support. Debates, lodged in Congress between the 1830s and the 1850s, disputed the appropriate form and function that an agriculture department should take. In 1839, Congress appropriated funds to the Patent Office of the Treasury Department to permit the acquisition of seeds and the creation of annual reports evaluating the country's agricultural production. It was not until 1862, however, when President Abraham Lincoln signed the Agricultural Act, that an independent Department of Agriculture was created.⁸

Led by Commissioner of Agriculture Isaac Newton, the new department published a monthly report collecting and analyzing agricultural statistics and data, introduced new plants and animals to American farmers, tested agricultural implements, established an agricultural library and museum, and conducted various other endeavors. Throughout the course of the nineteenth century, the influence of the department gradually increased, largely due to of several key pieces of legislation. The Morrill Act, enacted the same year the department was established, allocated large land grants to states, the sale of which funded the formation of public colleges focused on training in agriculture and the mechanical arts.⁹ The Hatch Act, passed by Congress and enacted in 1887, complemented the Morrill Act by creating state agricultural experiment stations. The rising prominence of the department culminated with the passage of an 1889 act that elevated it to a Cabinet-level department, with a Secretary appointed by the President.¹⁰

In 1897, the appointment of James Wilson as the fourth Secretary of Agriculture marked a new era in the Department, one in which it increasingly viewed agriculture as an industry to be regulated economically and advanced scientifically. Between 1901 and 1905, the scattered divisions of the agency were reorganized and consolidated into the bureaus of Plant Industry, Soils, Statistics, Chemistry, Entomology, Biological Survey, and Forestry, all with bureau heads that reported directly to the Secretary. Multiple pieces of legislation, most notably the Pure Food

⁸ Gladys L. Baker et al., *Century of Service* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963), 1-12.

⁹ Sixty-nine institutions were eventually funded through the Morrill Act, which was renewed in 1890.

¹⁰ Gladys L. Baker et al., *Century of Service* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963), 13-30.

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and Drug Act of 1906, sought to regulate and standardize the food industry as a domestic health and safety measure and as a way to expand the market for American agricultural products nationwide. Programs initiated by Wilson and continued by his successor David F. Houston effectively served the Department as it urged farmers to increase production in response to the demands of the war effort, both for domestic consumption and international export.¹¹

After World War I ended in 1918, the market for American agricultural products abroad shrank dramatically. A shrinking market, paired with various other factors—increased use of chemical fertilizers and insecticides, rising wages for farm workers, and greater mechanization of farm labor—placed economic strains on farm owners and laborers. By the late 1920s, American farmers were ill-equipped to handle a severe economic blow, which ultimately came in the form of the Great Depression.¹² Until then, direct economic subsidies provided by the Department of Agriculture had been limited, mainly coming in the form of seed and feed loans. This changed in 1933 with the passage of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, a key piece of President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal Legislation.¹³ The act provided direct subsidies to farmers to reduce crop production and therefore raise prices. This and other programs were intended to stabilize prices, restrict the foreclosure of farms, control crop surpluses, conserve exhausted soil, and provide drought relief.¹⁴

The Department of Agriculture emerged from the Great Depression as a “new” agency, whose focus was expanded to include regulation of agricultural markets, soil and forestry conservation, and direct aid, particularly to the rural poor. It also emerged as an agency better equipped to respond to the demands of a wartime populace. “Food will win the war,” a popular slogan and piece of government propaganda during both the First and Second World Wars, referenced the efforts of the U.S. Food Administration and other entities governed by the Department of Agriculture and intended to control the production, distribution, and consumption of food to support the war effort. Following the end of World War II, the Department refocused its energies on a number of prewar programs, including rural development, aid to the poor, agricultural extensions, and forestry conservation.¹⁵

History of the National Mall, 1790-1856

In 1790, the Residence Act designated a one-hundred square mile area—bridging the borders of the States of Maryland and Virginia and centered on the confluence of the Potomac River and its eastern branch—to be the boundaries of the nation’s future capital. French engineer Major Pierre Charles L’Enfant, who had established his reputation as the architect of Federal Hall in

¹¹ Gladys L. Baker et al., *Century of Service* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963), 39-64.

¹² Gladys L. Baker et al., *Century of Service* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963), 93-94.

¹³ The first Agricultural Adjustment Act was determined unconstitutional in 1936 by the Supreme Court decision in the case of *United States v. Butler*. The original 1933 act was replaced by a second Agricultural Adjustment Act passed in 1938, which carried forward many of the original programs of the first.

¹⁴ Gladys L. Baker et al., *Century of Service* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963), 143-148.

¹⁵ Gladys L. Baker et al., *Century of Service* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963), 245-350.

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New York City, was chosen to design the plan.¹⁶ L'Enfant's plan of 1791 was reminiscent of Europe's great capitals, particularly the city and palace of Versailles: a network of squares and circles were connected with radiating avenues, upon which were overlaid an irregular grid pattern. At its center, the plan was anchored by the Capitol and White House, situated perpendicular to each other and connected by a "Grand Avenue" four hundred feet in width, which would later be resurrected as the current iteration of the National Mall.¹⁷

As envisioned by L'Enfant, the Mall was a grand, T-shaped park. Its east-west axis linked the Capitol and a planned monument to Washington; its north-south axis linked the President's House, the monument, and the riverfront beyond. As published in 1792, the plan shows the Mall as a formal open space with a central tree-lined boulevard and parkland that was bordered by substantial buildings along B Street south (now Independence Avenue) on the south, and along the Washington canal on the north (see Figure 2). The function of the major buildings as depicted in L'Enfant's plan was not specified; however, in the division of land between the federal government and the land's original proprietors, the government retained the area between B Street north (Constitution Avenue) and B Street south (Independence Avenue) as federal reservations, thus paving the way for its eventual use for government buildings. When President George Washington presented the official map of the city to the District commissioners in 1797, the purpose of the Mall was described as being for the health and ornament of the city.¹⁸

More than one hundred years passed, however, before L'Enfant's grand French Baroque vision for the Mall was implemented, in reinterpreted form, in the early twentieth century. Considerable economic, geographic, and political difficulties prevented the full execution of the plan. The first major civic improvement constructed in the vicinity of the Mall was the Washington Canal. The path of the canal was outlined in L'Enfant's original plan for the city, but it was not designed until the early 1800s and was not completed until 1815.¹⁹ The canal flowed westward from the base of Capitol Hill to connect with the Potomac and was intended to draw shipping traffic into the city, thus stimulating mercantile activity along its banks. In practice, the canal proved to be a dismal failure both physically (it was too shallow to be navigated by deep barges) and environmentally (it soon became filled with stagnant water and refuse).²⁰ It succeeded, however, perhaps unintentionally, in providing formal definition to the northern edge of the Mall, dividing it from the commercial and residential uses beyond. During the extensive infrastructure improvements undertaken by the city in the 1870s, the canal was

¹⁶ Federal Hall was the site of a number of historic firsts: among others, it was the first Federal-style building constructed in the United States, was the country's first official Capitol building, and was the meeting place of the First Congress. From its cast-iron balcony, George Washington was inaugurated as the nation's first President.

¹⁷ Scott W. Berg, *Grand Avenues* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), 93-115.

¹⁸ Pamela Scott, "'This Vast Empire': The Iconography of the Mall, 1791-1848," in the *Mall in Washington, 1791-1991*, ed. Richard Longstreth, (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 46.

¹⁹ Prominent architect and civil engineer Benjamin Henry Latrobe designed the canal.

²⁰ John W. Reys, *Monumental Washington* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 29.

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channelized into an underground tunnel, alleviating the sanitary issues associated with running an open sewer through the center of a populated area.²¹

The first significant landscape installation on the Mall was a botanical garden at its eastern end, near the base of Capitol Hill. It was instigated by a private organization, the Columbian Institute, an intellectual society whose president believed that such a garden would stimulate the cultivation of private gardens and promote botanical studies. In 1820, Congress granted the Institute five acres, located between First and Third streets and Pennsylvania and Maryland avenues, which were fenced and improved with ponds and gravel walks with borders over the next several years. This private botanical undertaking set a precedent for the almost continuous use of various parts of the Mall for the promotion of botanical studies and education and public enjoyment of botanical displays. By the early 1840s, the gardens had fallen into disrepair, but the use was reestablished on the property when the federal government sponsored the construction of a small greenhouse on the property in 1842. A larger conservatory was constructed in 1850, and the U.S. Botanic Garden has remained in the vicinity of its original site ever since.²²

By the 1830s, the Mall was traversed by several north-south streets that, in subsequent years, came to define distinct planning areas of the Mall. Since the 1820s, the area between First and Third streets had been associated with botanical gardens. In 1846, the land between Seventh and Twelfth streets was chosen by the Smithsonian Regents—leaders of the newly formed institution funded by the bequest of James Smithson—to be the grounds of their institution’s building. Ground was broken for the Smithsonian Institution Building (popularly known as the Castle) in 1847. The following year, the foundations for the Washington Monument were laid, and the area west of Fourteenth Street and extending to the banks of the Potomac River was designated as Monument Park (see Figure 3).

Downing Plan

Planning for the Smithsonian Institution and the Washington Monument stimulated interest in improving the landscape of the neglected Mall. Robert Mills, designer of the Monument, prepared a landscape design for the Mall that divided it into a series of parks and gardens, which was not undertaken due to a lack of funding and Congressional action. As Washington grew in population and prosperity, however, more and more advocates for a landscape design for Mall emerged, including such prominent public and private individuals as the Commissioner of Public Buildings, Ignatius Mudd; the Secretary of the Smithsonian, Joseph Henry; the Mayor of Washington, Walter Lenox; and financier William Wilson Corcoran. In seeking Congressional funding, they argued that the Mall was a national amenity, not just a local park. Mudd, speaking for proponents of a landscape design, argued that “These public grounds are the property of the

²¹ John W. Reys, *Monumental Washington* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 59.

²² Pamela Scott, “‘This Vast Empire’: The Iconography of the Mall, 1791-1848,” in *The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991*, ed. Richard Longstreth, (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 46.

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nation, and were reserved at the founding of the city as a means of beautifying and adorning the national capitol.”²³

In 1851, the Smithsonian Building Committee proposed to hire Andrew Jackson Downing, the nation’s most prominent landscape designer, to draft a plan to convert “the whole Mall, including the Smithsonian grounds, into an extended landscape garden...planted with specimens properly labeled, of all the varieties of trees and shrubs which flourish in this climate.”²⁴ President Millard Fillmore agreed and invited Downing to design the grounds. Downing accepted the commission, and his design laid out a series of six related gardens stretching from the White House Ellipse and Washington Monument to the Capitol. Downing viewed the commission as an opportunity to educate the public as well as to beautify the capital. In writing to President Fillmore, he said: “the public grounds at Washington ... would undoubtedly become a Public School of instruction in every thing that relates to the tasteful arrangement of parks and grounds, and the growth and culture of trees, while serving more than anything that can be derived to embellish and give interest to the Capital.”²⁵

Downing’s vision for the Mall was a naturalistic, picturesque landscape that would provide city residents with the pleasures and elevating beauties of the countryside while also offering opportunities to educate the public about plants and trees. It was designed as an intentional contrast to the geometrical grandeur of the L’Enfant plan. Downing wrote: “The straight lines and broad avenues of the streets of Washington would be pleasantly relieved and contrasted by the beauty of curved lines and natural groups of trees in the various parks.”²⁶ Downing’s plan called for treating the Mall as six separate but complementary park areas linked by carriage drives. The President’s Park south of the White House and the Monument grounds were to be relatively open, with room for parade grounds, and trees planted singly or in small open groups, while other sections were designed to be more intimate. The sixteen-acre area between Twelfth and Fourteenth streets was to be populated with 130 native and foreign species evergreens, arranged to create a winter garden.²⁷

Congress appropriated funds to improve the Smithsonian Grounds according to Downing’s plan (see Figure 4). After Downing’s untimely death in 1852, however, his overall plan lost its most effective advocate and no significant additional improvements were undertaken until after the Civil War. Although Downing’s plan served as a guideline for the development of the remainder

²³ Therese O’Malley, “‘A Public Museum of Trees’: Mid-Nineteenth Century Plans for the Mall,” in *The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991*, ed. Richard Longstreth, (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 65.

²⁴ Therese O’Malley, “‘A Public Museum of Trees’: Mid-Nineteenth Century Plans for the Mall,” in *The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991*, ed. Richard Longstreth, (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 65.

²⁵ Therese O’Malley, “‘A Public Museum of Trees’: Mid-Nineteenth Century Plans for the Mall,” in *The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991*, ed. Richard Longstreth, (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 70.

²⁶ Therese O’Malley, “‘A Public Museum of Trees’: Mid-Nineteenth Century Plans for the Mall,” in *The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991*, ed. Richard Longstreth, (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 71.

²⁷ Therese O’Malley, “‘A Public Museum of Trees’: Mid-Nineteenth Century Plans for the Mall,” in *The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991*, ed. Richard Longstreth, (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 68-69.

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of the Mall until the end of the nineteenth century, it was interpreted differently by each of the government agencies that had jurisdiction over different sections of the Mall. Despite the incompleteness of its implementation, Downing's plan successfully cast the Mall as a horticultural showpiece and a place for public edification. It also revived the expanse of public grounds as intended by L'Enfant, reasserting the triangular geometry of the monumental core (defined by the White House, the Washington Monument, and the Capitol), which had been allowed to deteriorate while the Mall remained undeveloped.²⁸

Department of Agriculture: Beginnings on the Mall

The Department of Agriculture obtained its first toehold on the Mall in 1856. At that time, the department was neither an autonomous government agency nor was it a cabinet-level position. Instead, the federal government's agricultural activities were performed by the Agricultural Division, which was established in the Patent Office in the 1830s. Responding to the Division's request for land for propagating seeds and cuttings, Congress, in 1856, assigned the Division five acres on public space between 4½ and Sixth streets, N.W., north of the Washington Canal on land that had been marsh along the banks of Tiber Creek.²⁹ After two years of draining and preparation, it was in 1858 officially designated the Propagating Gardens, and greenhouses were constructed on the site.³⁰

When the Department of Agriculture was formally established in 1862, its first Commissioner, Isaac Newton, was given jurisdiction over the Propagating Gardens. Newton soon requested additional land for the Department's agricultural work. In 1863, the Commissioner of Public Buildings gave the Department the use of the land between Twelfth and Fourteenth streets, from the southern edge of the canal to B Street, S.W. (see Figure 5). The Department also retained use of the Propagating Gardens at the east end of the Mall (between 4 ½ and Sixth streets) until 1873, when the canal was filled in. At this time, the department was given four filled acres between Twelfth and Fourteenth streets in exchange for its land further east.

First Agriculture Department Building and its Grounds

The Agriculture Department's use of what became known as the Agriculture Grounds between Twelfth and Fourteenth streets changed with the construction of a building, designed by Adolph Cluss, to house the Department. Adolph (or Adolf) Cluss was a prominent German-American architect who, during the 1860s to 1880s, designed a number of public buildings in Washington, particularly schools, markets, churches, and government buildings. Begun in August 1867 and completed the next year, the Agriculture Building was located on the Mall north of B Street,

²⁸ Therese O'Malley, "A Public Museum of Trees': Mid-Nineteenth Century Plans for the Mall," in *The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991*, ed. Richard Longstreth, (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 73.

²⁹ This is currently the site of the National Gallery of Art's West Building.

³⁰ Dana G. Dalrymple, "Agriculture, Architects, and the Mall, 1901-1905: the Plan is Tested," in *Designing the Nation's Capital*, ed. Sue Kohler and Pamela Scott (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, 2006), 209.

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S.W., but it was sited slightly farther south of the center line of the Mall than the North Tower of the Smithsonian Building. Like many of Cluss's other commissions, the building was constructed of red brick and featured French Second Empire, Romanesque, and Italianate influences. A T-shaped conservatory was constructed west of the new building with its north elevation in line with that of the main building. The stem of the T extended toward B Street, S.W., and a stable was located on B Street directly south of the main building. Over the next few years, additional greenhouses and subsidiary buildings were constructed on land initially proposed for experimental grounds and orchards in the area bounded by the Department building and the conservatory on the north, and B Street, S.W., on the south.

Extending north from the Agriculture Building, the Agriculture Grounds were designed by William Saunders, a prominent botanist, horticulturist, and landscape designer hired in 1862 by Commissioner Newton to manage the Propagating Gardens. Saunders divided the garden into two parts: immediately north of the buildings was a formal garden with flower beds and symmetrical walks defined along its northern boundary by an ornamental wall; the larger, northern section beyond was a public arboretum (see Figure 6). Saunders designed the geometrical formal garden to illustrate "a fitting accompaniment to a large building," while the arboretum was designed for both the pleasure and the education of the public.³¹ Like Downing, Saunders was not only a landscape designer but also a nurseryman interested in developing and introducing new plants, and a writer who wanted to improve agricultural practices by educating the public. In the arboretum, plants were organized by botanical family and, in 1868, Saunders described the planned arboretum as "a school of instruction" which would "advance our progress in the knowledge of vegetable physiology, and furnish a strong incentive to botanical studies."³² Saunders also used plant displays to promote knowledge of plants with commercial value.

Although Saunders' design of the Agriculture Grounds perpetuated Downing's plan for individualized treatment of each section of the Mall and plantings that provided instruction for the public, he had previously advocated the concept of a central boulevard unifying the Mall, echoing L'Enfant's plan, and he prepared for that eventuality. Assigned to work with architect Adolph Cluss on the siting of the Agriculture Department building, Saunders recommended placing it south of the line of the Smithsonian Building so that it would not impede the construction of a possible future central roadway.³³

By the 1880s, subsidiary greenhouses had been constructed on the eastern side of the stem of the T-shaped conservatory, while a formally organized garden with various beds was located on its western side. South of the Agriculture Department building were several auxiliary buildings, the largest of which was the Entomology Building located immediately southeast of the main

³¹ Andrew White, "Garden of Necessity: Sustaining Our Natural and Cultural Inheritances on the National Mall," (master's thesis, University of Georgia, 2011), 81.

³² Andrew White, "Garden of Necessity: Sustaining Our Natural and Cultural Inheritances on the National Mall," (master's thesis, University of Georgia, 2011), 77.

³³ Andrew White, "Garden of Necessity: Sustaining Our Natural and Cultural Inheritances on the National Mall," (master's thesis, University of Georgia, 2011), 77.

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building. A stable fronting on B Street was located on the southeast corner of the Agriculture Grounds. By the end of the nineteenth century there were small experimental or demonstration plots in the open area between the Entomology Building and the stable, which later became the site of the Department's Agriculture Museum (see Figure 7).

The increasing number of subsidiary buildings on the Agriculture Grounds site was just one indication of the growth of the Agriculture Department after the Civil War. It soon outgrew its 1868 building and was particularly in need of more and better laboratory space. Most of its employees were located in rented buildings along or in the vicinity of B Street, S.W. Despite the promotion of Agriculture to a Cabinet-level department in 1889, its requests for funding for an additional building went unheeded until 1901. By the time Congress authorized funding to design a new Agriculture Building, planning was underway to redesign the Mall.

The McMillan Commission

At the turn of the twentieth century, forces converged to guide the development of Washington, D.C. by reintroducing L'Enfant's original plan. The movement was led by Glenn Brown, a well-connected Washington architect and author of a history of the U.S. Capitol; Charles Moore, aide to Senator James McMillan of Michigan, chairman of the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia; and others, who worked to develop a consensus among leading architects, landscape designers, and sculptors on the importance of completing such a task, as well as the importance of involving leading professionals in its process and execution.³⁴ In part, the movement was stimulated by the overwhelming success of the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893, which had presented the glittering spectacle of a monumental, Beaux Arts-inspired city core.

In 1900, the annual meeting of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) was to be held in Washington. Falling on the one-hundredth anniversary of the federal government's move to Washington, the meeting was designed by Brown to serve as a platform for promoting the L'Enfant scheme, as well as the creation of a commission to plan the city's development along the same lines. He invited leading architects, landscape planners, and sculptors to speak and briefed them on the original plan for the city. He wrote to one participant, "It is intended by these papers to call the attention of Congress forcibly to the need of some harmonious scheme to be followed in the future development of Washington," and he invited members of Congress and the public to attend.³⁵

³⁴ Brown was a founding member of the Washington Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1887 and became Secretary of the national organization in 1898. Brown had studied the L'Enfant Plan for Washington and also found inspiration in the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago for a park-like avenue in Washington.

³⁵ Tony P. Wrenn, "The American Institute of Architects Convention of 1900: Its Influence on the Senate Park Commission Plan," in *Designing the Nation's Capital*, ed. Sue Kohler and Pamela Scott (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, 2006), 57.

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One outcome of the 1900 AIA annual meeting was the passage of a Senate resolution authorizing the president to “appoint a commission, to consist of two architects and one landscape architect eminent in their profession, who shall consider the subject of the location and grouping of public buildings and monuments to be erected in the District of Columbia and the development and improvement of the entire park system...” and to report to Congress.³⁶

Architects Daniel H. Burnham and Charles F. McKim, and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. were appointed to the Commission, and later the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens was added. It was officially titled the Senate Park Commission but the plan it developed is generally referred to as the McMillan Commission because of the role that Senator McMillan played in the creation of the Commission. The Commission, which studied the history of the early planning of Washington, also traveled extensively in Europe, visiting its great cities and parks. Within less than a year it reported its plan, inspired by that of L’Enfant, but much broader in scope, for the central core, the placement of government buildings, and the creation of outlying parks.

Completed and presented to Congress in January 1902, the plan proposed to open up the vista from the Capitol to the Monument by creating a central swath of grass lined on each side by elm allées and extending from the base of Capitol Hill to Fourteenth Street, N.W. The popular gardens and wooded walks of the Smithsonian and Agriculture Grounds were to be eliminated. New government buildings were to be set back 445 feet from the center line of the Mall. With setbacks of approximately three-hundred feet, both the Smithsonian Institution Building and the Agriculture Department Building intruded on the central lawn. The plan anticipated the removal of those and all existing buildings that lay inside the plan’s 890-foot greensward.

The Commission’s plan was widely publicized and well received. The public was invited to the Corcoran Gallery to view models of the existing city against the proposed design. However, once the Commission had issued its report there was no formal mechanism for implementing its recommendations. Joseph Cannon (Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee from December 1901 to July 1902 and Speaker of the House after November 1903) was implacably opposed to its implementation, partly for reasons of economy but also because he felt that the Senate District Committee had circumvented him in his capacity as chairman of the House Appropriations Committee when it established the Commission using contingency funds instead of seeking appropriations.

Until the Commission of Fine Arts was established in 1910, the work of ensuring that the recommendations of the McMillan Plan were heeded as individual decisions were made was dependent upon the political support of Commission members, of President Theodore Roosevelt, and of interested members of his administration. The battle over the design and placement of the

³⁶ Tony P. Wrenn, “The American Institute of Architects Convention of 1900: Its Influence on the Senate Park Commission Plan,” in *Designing the Nation’s Capital*, ed. Sue Kohler and Pamela Scott (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, 2006), 57.

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new Agriculture Building proved extremely influential in lending legitimacy to the plan, and was one of the first buildings proposed (if not fully designed or constructed) for the Mall that adopted all of its principles.³⁷

The New Administration Building, 1901-1930

The Department's rapid growth in the early twentieth century, particularly as a scientific organization, necessitated modern, centralized headquarters and laboratories. By 1901, the needs of the agency had far outstripped the capacity of its 1868 building, whose mansard roof and polychrome brickwork had long fallen out of architectural fashion and stood in direct opposition to the McMillan Plan, which would be presented—with much fanfare—the following January. In March 1901, Secretary Wilson's requests for a new administration building were answered by Congress, who appropriated 5,000 dollars for the planning of a new building.

Secretary Wilson, quoted in the *Evening Star*, spoke of his priorities for the new facility: "We want a handsome building—nothing too elaborate, but we want it to be good in all ways... As to the architectural style to be followed, I am going to take advice, but the building ought to be of stone. We want a quadrangle." Wilson also related the substandard conditions under which Department researchers were compelled to work: "The Department of Agriculture is now conducting all of its laboratory work in rented buildings, located outside of the department grounds. These buildings are for the most part mere makeshifts, consisting of dwelling houses remodeled to permit laboratory work. Some of them are overcrowded, and none are fireproof... The work carried on by the laboratories is of the highest importance... and it would be impossible to replace it in case of loss by fire."³⁸

Wilson solicited the assistance of James Knox Taylor, then Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department, as an expert advisor. Taylor recommended that the members of the newly formed McMillan Commission (Burnham, McKim, Olmsted, and Saint-Gaudens) act as an architectural advisory group for the project. The advisory group recommended that the design be selected by competition, naming ten firms to whom invitations should be sent. Invitees included such luminaries as John Russell Pope, Peabody and Stearns, and Carrere and Hastings. Firms were provided with a program and budget for the building, which was to be fireproof and "classical in character," although no building site was specified.³⁹

³⁷ Early planning for the Smithsonian's U.S. National Museum (now the National Museum for Natural History) almost exactly paralleled that for the Department of Agriculture Building. Funds for the museum were appropriated in January 1903, and ground was broken the following June. The museum was completed and opened to the public in March 1910. The second building completed to conform to the precepts of the McMillan Plan was the Freer Gallery, which was designed by architect Charles Platt in 1916 and opened to the public in May 1923, seven years before the center block of the Administration Building was completed.

³⁸ "For a New Building, Secretary Wilson Will Have Plans Prepared," *Evening Star*, March 8, 1901, NewsBank, Inc.

³⁹ Dana G. Dalrymple, "Agriculture, Architects, and the Mall, 1901-1905: the Plan is Tested," in *Designing the Nation's Capital*, ed. Sue Kohler and Pamela Scott (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, 2006), 213.

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New York firm Lord & Hewlett submitted the winning entry, which was chosen in October of that year, and was projected to cost 2.5 million dollars. As proposed, the building was five stories tall, with a central administrative block flanked by adjoining laboratory wings. Measuring four-hundred feet in width and two-hundred in depth, the building's principal façade was dominated by a heptastyle portico carried by colossal Corinthian columns and infilled with double-story, rounded arched windows. The three-part configuration of the building lent itself to phased completion, allowing the Department to occupy the completed parts of the building while the others were still under construction.⁴⁰

Simmering beneath the general approbation for Lord & Hewlett's winning design was a much more resonant and complicated issue for the new building: how its siting and character would affect the realization of the McMillan Plan. The House Agriculture Committee favored a building facing B Street, N.W., and conforming to the 300-foot setback established by the Smithsonian Institution Building. The north mall site and 300-foot setback were preferable to the Department of Agriculture, as they allowed for substantially larger buildings on both sides of the Agriculture Grounds. The McMillan Plan's supporters, who favored a 445-foot setback, criticized the proposal. Further, the Commission intended all the buildings along this parkway to face inward, rather than toward the outer streets. As Representative Wadsworth, chair of the House Committee on Agriculture, objected, "The committee is unalterably opposed to this site and the proposition to face the building toward the proposed [Mall]... This will set the building in a veritable hollow, where it will make no showing in the world, and where the back of the building will be the place that everybody will have to enter."⁴¹

As it unfolded, the process to design the Administration Building was fraught with complexities. The major players in the dispute—Joseph Cannon, Secretary Wilson, President Theodore Roosevelt, the members of the McMillan Commission, Lord & Hewlett, among others—each endeavored to satisfy the needs and objectives of his own agency. James Wilson wanted a new and commodious building for his department; Joseph Cannon sought to avoid the expensive precedent of overly grandiose federal buildings; and proponents of the McMillan Plan believed that if the new Agriculture building did not conform to the plan's requirements, their project would be a failure from the outset.

Several formative actions occurred as a result of these debates. The first of these was the passage of *An Act For the erection of a building for the use and accommodation of the Department of Agriculture* on February 9, 1903. The law authorized the expenditure of 1.5 million dollars for the building's construction, significantly less than Lord & Hewlett's original proposal. The Department also found the firm's design incompatible with the light and ventilation requirements of laboratory space. Under these circumstances, and with a reduced commission rate, Lord & Hewlett refused to enter into contract, effectively ending their

⁴⁰ "A New Building," *Evening Star*, December 20, 1901, NewsBank, Inc.

⁴¹ "Against the Plans," *Evening Star*, January 27, 1904, NewsBank, Inc.

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relationship with the Department of Agriculture in May 1903.⁴² Members of the Department of Agriculture Building Committee recommended Rankin, Kellogg & Crane as suitable replacements. Although a Philadelphia firm, they were well connected in Washington (Rankin was a Washington native who had worked under McKim, and Crane was a former employee of the Supervising Architect's Office) and were then engaged on several other government projects. They entered into contract with the Department in September 1903.

The design of the new building, however, was still being debated. The Secretary wanted a fine classical building compatible with the McMillan Commission's recommendation that all government buildings along the Mall be built in the classical style, drawing on Roman precedents and built using costly stone ornament. Congress favored a more utilitarian building of brick and terra cotta, which could be achieved with the 1.5 million dollars allotted. Secretary Wilson's solution to the dilemma was to start with the construction of the proposed building's two laboratory wings—the most desperately needed facilities—leaving a space between them for the central administrative block, which would be funded under a later appropriation. In the meantime, the Department could continue to use, rather than raze, its original Cluss building.⁴³

Despite Wilson's proposal to construct the building in phases, the parties involved continued to debate over its proper location and setback. The Agriculture Building Committee strongly favored a site on the northern side of the Mall, as it would allow them considerably more room for expansion, and would not necessitate the immediate demolition of any of their occupied buildings or greenhouses on the south side (see Figure 8).⁴⁴ Another contentious issue was the adoption of the 600, 800, or 890-foot Mall width. In this discussion, President Theodore Roosevelt was asked to intervene on several occasions. The issue was resolved on May 7, 1904, when Roosevelt visited the south site. Roosevelt determined both that the building would be constructed there and that it would conform to the 890-foot setback. A few weeks later he wrote, "...this year I have forced the erection of the new buildings of the Agricultural Department, in accordance with the...McMillan Plan, preserving the...Mall. Congress did not do it. I did it."⁴⁵

Construction of Laboratory Wings, 1904-1908

Rankin, Kellogg & Crane modified their design to reflect the new site and setback decreed by Roosevelt, completing their plans by August 1904, which were subsequently released for bid

⁴² The disagreement, however, resulted in a lengthy legal dispute, which was taken to the Court of Claims in 1908 and the Supreme Court in 1909. Both cases were decided against Lord & Hewlett.

⁴³ U.S. General Services Administration, *Historical Study No. 2, Agriculture Administration Building* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964), 2-3.

⁴⁴ The reason for the uneven building sites was due to one of the McMillan Commission's key ideas. The commission report recommended that the Mall's central axis be skewed, to visually reconcile the Washington Monument's siting several hundred feet to the south of the intended location. At the western edge of the axis, it was considerably skewed closer to B Street South.

⁴⁵ Dana G. Dalrymple, "Agriculture, Architects, and the Mall, 1901-1905: the Plan is Tested," in *Designing the Nation's Capital*, ed. Sue Kohler and Pamela Scott (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, 2006), 213.

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(see Figures 9 and 10). An innovative component of the building's design was its use of a reinforced concrete structural system, which allowed the laboratories to be completely fireproof.⁴⁶ The contract for construction was awarded in December, and ground was broken several days later.⁴⁷

Excavations for the foundations were dug, and a full-size mock-up of a short segment of the building's façade was erected on the site. In late February, however, a member of the Corps of Engineers alerted the architects and McKim that the grading around the building did not conform to the general plan for the Mall. McKim, inspecting the situation in consultation with Rankin, Kellogg & Crane, recommended two significant changes. First, the footprint of the building should be shifted to be equidistant from Twelfth and Fourteenth streets, rather than centered on Thirteenth Street (the squares being unequal in width). Second, the building should be lowered seven to ten feet to conform to the prevailing Mall grades. Members of Congress, Secretary Wilson, and some members of the Department of Agriculture Building Committee vigorously protested the cost and delay that would be created by implementing these recommendations, while others were more receptive. In March, President Roosevelt was again asked to intervene to resolve the dispute. In a meeting held at the White House, Roosevelt formally censured the architects for their unnecessary expenditure of public funds, but he also asked Secretary Wilson to comply with their requests. Wilson agreed.⁴⁸

The foundations of the building were moved 106 feet to the west and dug deeper to accommodate the sunken ground story. To allow for the exposure of the rusticated granite on the ground story, but also to provide for interior illumination, wide areaways with sloping berms were installed along the perimeter of the building. Following the realignment, construction continued without further interruption, and the laboratory wings were occupied in 1907 and completed in 1908 (see Figures 11 and 12). The construction of the two wings necessitated the demolition of several buildings around the site, including the museum, greenhouses, and various other subsidiary buildings lying close to B Street. Most of the more substantial buildings, including the 1868 Agriculture Building and the brick Entomology Building, were retained and continued to be occupied by the Department (see Figure 13).

The construction of the new wings, in the classical style and in keeping with the McMillan Plan's building lines for the Mall, represented one of the first steps in the plan's realization. On the eve of the inauguration of his successor William Howard Taft, President Theodore Roosevelt issued an executive order creating a body he named the Council of Fine Arts, which would advise the federal government in matters relating to architecture (including selection of building

⁴⁶ Vertical columns were formed from hollow concrete blocks, stacked and threaded with vertical steel rods. These columns were then fully encased in brick partition walls, all of which were load bearing.

⁴⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture, 1904* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1905), 117-118.

⁴⁸ Dana G. Dalrymple, "Agriculture, Architects, and the Mall, 1901-1905: the Plan is Tested," in *Designing the Nation's Capital*, ed. Sue Kohler and Pamela Scott (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, 2006), 213.

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sites), art, landscape architecture, and memorials.⁴⁹ However, the grand plans for the Mall parkway of grass lined with rows of elms remained on hold for another twenty-five years and, despite the construction of the two new marble-clad wings, a jumble of other buildings remained scattered around the Agriculture Grounds (see Figures 14 through 17).

McMillan Plan Implementation, 1910-1935

Once the location of the new Agriculture Building had been determined, the evolving implementation of the McMillan Plan from 1910 to 1930 had relatively little impact on the section of the Mall between Twelfth and Fourteenth streets that was under the jurisdiction of the Department of Agriculture. The review and planning bodies that were created in that period, however, established a framework for the gradual implementation of the Plan. These bodies included members who had been involved in the development of the McMillan Commission Plan and had helped guide its implementation, most notably Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and Charles Moore (aide to Senator McMillan). Thus, when the Agriculture Building was completed in 1930, the improvement of the grounds was undertaken as part of the larger, ongoing scheme to landscape the Mall according to the principles of the McMillan Commission Plan.

In the first decade after the McMillan Commission presented its report to Congress, various elements of the plan were implemented, including the removal of the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad Depot from the Mall, the construction of Union Station, and the construction of the classical revival-style National Museum (now the National Museum of Natural History), which established the precedent of conforming to the building line recommended by the McMillan Commission on the north side of the Mall.

In 1910, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) was established. Although only an advisory body initially intended to advise on matters relating to art, particularly on statues, monuments and fountains erected in the District of Columbia, its authority was soon extended to include advising on plans for public buildings erected by the District of Columbia Government. Two members of the McMillan Commission were appointed to the seven-person CFA: Daniel Burnham was its chairman and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. served two terms on the Commission, from 1910 to 1918. Charles Moore was appointed as a lay member to the Commission and chaired it from 1915 to 1937. Thus, from the outset, members of the CFA were proponents of the implementation of the McMillan Plan.

In its early years, the CFA was involved in the planning of the Grant and Lincoln Memorials and the Arlington Memorial Bridge. In the late 1920s, the Commission began spending considerable time on issues relating to the traffic on the north-south roads traversing the Mall, the need for east-west roads, and the question of grading the Mall, which sloped upward from north to south. Subsequently, in 1931, the Commission approved plans for roads and planting that called for the

⁴⁹ Roosevelt's Executive Order 1010 was later revoked by Taft's Executive Order 1074. Formal legislation approving the actions of a newly created Commission of Fine Arts was passed in May 1910.

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removal of many of the Mall's trees in anticipation of planting four rows of elms on either side of a central green carpet of grass. In response to public concern about digging up the popular Mall landscape, plans were made to transplant its finer trees and shrubs.⁵⁰

Although Olmsted was no longer sitting on the CFA, he continued to be involved in the planning of the Mall in a new capacity. In 1926, Congress created the National Capital Park and Planning Commission (NCPPC) with authority to undertake comprehensive planning for the District of Columbia. (NCPPC was preceded by the short-lived National Capital Park Commission, which was created in 1924 and which had responsibility for the development of a comprehensive park system for Washington. NCPPC was replaced by the National Capital Planning Commission following the passage of the National Capital Planning Act in 1952. This legislation gave the agency the authority and functions it exercises today). NCPPC included both government officials and private practitioners as members of its Commission, and Olmsted was one of the four original members from the private sector. Although the NCPPC was not explicitly charged with implementing the recommendations of the McMillan Plan, completing the Mall along the lines of the McMillan Plan was one of the new Commissions initial priorities. Olmsted and other commissioners proposed guidelines in 1927 for the development of the Mall that called for an open vista from the Capitol to the Washington Monument and removal of trees that obstructed that view, rows of elms to frame the view as recommended by the McMillan Commission, and restriction of public buildings to the outer portions of the Mall, by means of a longitudinal building line, so that they would not obstruct the vista.⁵¹

At the end of the 1920s, the Mall between the Capitol and the Washington Monument still retained its Victorian appearance with winding paths through the densely planted Smithsonian Grounds and the more open formal garden and arboretum of the Agriculture Grounds. But in March 1929, Congress enacted legislation authorizing funding to landscape the Mall that was primarily focused on enlarging the Capitol grounds. The legislation urged the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital to proceed with the development of the public areas connecting the Capitol Grounds with the Washington Monument, "known as the Mall parkway, in accordance with the plans of Major L'Enfant and the so-called McMillan Commission, with such modifications thereof as may be recommended by the National Capital Park and Planning Commission and approved by the Commission for Enlarging of the Capitol Grounds."⁵² The legislation also laid the groundwork for transferring jurisdiction of the Smithsonian and Agriculture Grounds to the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks.

⁵⁰ Sue A. Kohler, *The Commission of Fine Arts: A Brief History, 1910-1995* (Washington, D.C.: Commission of Fine Arts, 1996): 27-29.

⁵¹ National Capital Planning Commission and Frederick Gutheim, *Worthy of the Nation: the History of Planning for the Nation* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977), 218.

⁵² Kay Fanning, *The Mall Cultural Landscape Inventory*, Cultural Landscapes Program, National Park Service National Capital Region, 2006, 58.

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Construction of Center Block, 1928-1930

During the two decades between the planning for the new Department of Agriculture Building and its completion, the Department's workforce was growing by leaps and bounds. Between February 1903 (when the initial authorization for building occurred) and 1908, the number of Department staff members working in the District of Columbia almost doubled, growing from 1,100 to 2,100.⁵³ By 1926, that number had grown to over 4,700.⁵⁴ Although Agriculture was not the only department sorely in need of space, its shortages were among the most acute, with its various bureaus dispersed amongst forty-five rented buildings throughout the city.⁵⁵

In May 1926, Congress addressed these deficiencies by passing the Public Buildings Act, a statute that governed the construction of federal buildings throughout the country and authorized funding for their construction. Of the total 165 million dollars authorized by the Act, fifty million were directed towards federal buildings in the District of Columbia. About half of these funds were spent aggregating the large, triangular piece of property that would become Federal Triangle. The other half was dedicated to the construction of the Supreme Court Building, the Government Printing Office extension, and the Agriculture Department Buildings (including both the completion of the Administration Building and the acquisition of properties across B Street, S.W.).⁵⁶ Under the authority of the Public Buildings Act, Congress appropriated 400,000 dollars toward the construction of the center block of the Administration Building, authorizing a total budget not to exceed two million dollars.⁵⁷

Rankin & Kellogg (Crane left the firm to found his own practice in 1925) were again retained to design the center block. For the most part, they revived their former, 1904 designs. However, they eliminated the central, domed rotunda of the earlier scheme, replacing it with an interior courtyard that reduced construction costs and provided for additional office space. Excavation began in 1928, and the current Secretary of Agriculture, William Jardine, laid the cornerstone in a public ceremony in January 1929. Despite a twenty-two-year lapse between the completion of the wings and the center block, the building was praised as "the Most Satisfyingly Harmonious Building in the World" when the final portion was completed in 1930 (see Figures 18 through 23).⁵⁸

Following the completion of the new Administration Building, most of the old buildings scattered around the site were razed. This included the two largest brick buildings on the

⁵³ U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture, 1907* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1908), 138.

⁵⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture, 1927* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1928), 85.

⁵⁵ "Dire Building Need of U.S. Stressed in Hearing on Bill," *Evening Star*, January 7, 1926, NewsBank, Inc.

⁵⁶ Antoinette J. Lee, *Architects to the Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 238-241.

⁵⁷ *U.S. Statutes at Large, Volume II, Public Laws of the United States of America, Sixty-Ninth Congress, 1925-1927* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1927), 874.

⁵⁸ Farmer Mason, "New Agriculture Building Model Structure," *Evening Star*, November 3, 1929, NewsBank, Inc.

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property, the Entomology Building and the old 1868 Agriculture Building. With those buildings cleared, the grounds were readied for improvement. With Olmsted already at work overseeing the recommendations of the McMillan Plan on the Mall, the timing was propitious to landscape the north lawn of the Agriculture Grounds.⁵⁹

Landscape of the Agriculture Grounds, 1900-1930

Landscape of the East and West Wings

Although various outbuildings on the southern portion of the Agriculture Grounds were demolished for the construction of the east and west wings of Administration Building in 1904, relatively little significant new landscape improvement occurred until the 1930s. Between 1908 and 1928, the principal additions to the landscape were a horseshoe shaped driveway bisected by a walkway to provide access to the east wing from Twelfth Street, and a crescent-shaped driveway, also bisected by a walkway, to provide access to the west wing from Fourteenth Street.

Other changes to the grounds prior to the 1930 included the demolition of the conservatory and greenhouses north of the west wing (sometime between 1908 and 1915). The formal square garden area southwest of the conservatory was also leveled.⁶⁰ The entire area north of the west wing and west of the original Agriculture Building was transformed into a flat field, planted in grass, with several small round flower beds around the margins. The area between the two new wings was planted in grass and was traversed both north-south and east-west by walkways with the crossing marked by four small shrubs. The area on the south side of the West Wing was largely occupied by a power house that had been constructed to serve the two wings, which was later converted to a workshop.

Buildings on the north side of the east wing were retained, including two brick entomology buildings which stood until 1930, and several minor greenhouses. By 1915, a small white press service building had been constructed west of the Entomology Building. By 1930, a total of ten structures of various sizes were crowded into the area north of the east wing.⁶¹ The south side of the east wing was planted in grass with minimal a minimal planting paln consisting of several flower beds and a few small shrubs.

By the late 1920s, the area between the two wings was used principally as a parking lot. The area north of the 1868 Agriculture Building still retained much of its nineteenth century configuration

⁵⁹ One large building, the power plant located in the southwest court, remained on the site following the completion of the new building. At some point between 1916 and 1923, the small Alcohol Building had been erected in the southeast court.

⁶⁰ Over time the Agriculture Department built a large number of greenhouses on the north side of its grounds along B Street N.W. (now Constitution Avenue) on the site of the canal that had been filled in. Some of these were open to the public and used for plant displays.

⁶¹ "Plan of New Road and Walks," CEDIS, RG 121 DC0003 042, Records of the Public Buildings Service, RG 121, Cartographic Division, National Archives, College Park, MD.

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but the Agriculture Grounds, like the rest of the Mall, was succumbing to the pressures created by automobiles. The CFA reported in 1930 that, “the entire Mall park...has become an open air garage; in the Department of Agriculture Grounds automobiles are parked on the grass.”⁶²

Olmsted Brothers Landscape Design

When the center block of the Administration Building was finally completed in 1930, the Olmsted Brothers were already engaged in designing the Mall landscape along the lines of the 1902 McMillan Plan. The NCPPC, of which Olmsted was a member, was the lead government agency responsible for drawing up plans and coordinating the various government agencies responsible for different aspects of planning and implementation. Olmsted and his firm were responsible for much of the detailed design work of the overall plan.

The Agriculture Grounds were the first section of the Mall to be replanted in accordance with the McMillan Plan as revived and refined by the NCPPC. In January 1931, Ulysses S. Grant III wrote Agriculture Secretary Arthur M. Hyde asking for his “assistance in forwarding the completion of the Mall project as far as practicable in front of the Department of Agriculture.” Noting that an appropriation for development of the Mall was then before Congress, and that fill to level the slope on the Agriculture Grounds would be available that summer from construction in the Federal Triangle, he wrote that “the whole area between Twelfth and Fourteenth streets in the Mall could be planted and improved in accordance with the final plans as an example of the treatment proposed for the whole Mall.” The concept of using plants from the old Agricultural Grounds to plant the grounds of the Agriculture building was already in place by mid-January. Grant wrote Hyde that “many trees and shrubs in the area to be filled could be moved to provide a setting for your new building.”⁶³

One of the most challenging issues Olmsted and the NCPPC faced “was the topography of the Mall’s west end, from Ninth to Fourteenth streets, and particularly the old Agriculture grounds, between Twelfth and Fourteenth. The land here had a pronounced east-west ridge along its south side, and sank almost thirty feet in elevation from south to north down to Constitution Avenue.”⁶⁴ Olmsted initially opposed filling the area to level it, partly out of concern about public reaction to the massive removal of trees from a beloved park. By the time the Agriculture Building had been completed, however, Olmsted was committed to filling and leveling the Mall. Much of the fill came from the excavations for Federal Triangle buildings. Sensitive to public concern about the specimen trees on the Agriculture Grounds, Olmsted also committed to

⁶² Commission of Fine Arts, Eleventh Report of the Commission of Fine Arts, January 1, 1926 to June 30, 1929, Washington, D.C., 1930, p. 31 quoted in Kay Fanning, *The Mall Cultural Landscape Inventory*, Cultural Landscapes Program, National Park Service National Capital Region, 2006, 58.

⁶³ Ulysses S. Grant III to Arthur M. Hyde, January 17, 1931, Correspondence Relating to Operation of Administration Building, 1926-1939, Records of the Office of Plant and Operations, 1839-1981, Records of the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, RG 16, Entry 168, Box 1, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁶⁴ Kay Fanning, *The Mall Cultural Landscape Inventory*, Cultural Landscapes Program, National Park Service National Capital Region, 2006, 60.

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transplanting many of the trees and shrubs, even large ones, which would otherwise have been destroyed. Most of the transplanted trees were moved within the Mall or to the Washington Monument Grounds, and others were relocated to the Agriculture Department Grounds.⁶⁵

The plan for the Mall also involved the laying of four new roads (drives) running east to west on either side of the planned rows of elms. The outer two roads were to serve the new Mall buildings. A section of new roadway, now Jefferson Drive, was installed north of the new Agriculture building between Twelfth and Fourteenth streets in 1930.

Olmsted worked on the landscape of the area in the immediate vicinity of the newly completed Agriculture Building from approximately February to October 1931. He visited the Agriculture Department site with his assistant, Leon H. Zach, in late February 1931. By mid-March, the Olmsted firm had prepared plans for planting. These addressed three sides of the new building: the east side bounded by Twelfth Street, the north side bounded by the new South (Jefferson) Drive, and the west side bounded by Fourteenth Street. The plant list described a total of forty-five trees and shrubs to be moved, and the trees to be transplanted included two mature ginkgoes to be placed on both sides of the entrance and also two large elms that were to come from another site (see Figures 24-26).⁶⁶

The Olmsted plan put out to bid in March 1931 included a grading plan showing the location on the Agriculture Grounds of each of the specimen trees and shrubs to be transplanted and a second plan showing where they were to be planted around the new building. A Washington, D.C., firm, A. Gude Sons, was the successful bidder for the transplanting contract and the work was completed by May 21, 1931. A photograph dated September 1931—only a few months after transplanting—shows the maturity of the transplanted trees. Olmsted's plan also called for the planting of a few deciduous trees at a later date.

The lawn area north of the west wing, on both sides of the road, and the area in front of the center Administration Building were planted in the spring of 1931 with a cover crop of soybeans designed to improve and prepare the soil for seeding with grass in the fall. Instructions for planting were set out in a memorandum by Dr. W. A. Taylor, chief of the Bureau of Plant Industry. He recommended planting soybeans in mid to late May in rows far enough apart to cultivate. This would assist in eliminating Bermuda and crab grass. The soybeans were to be plowed under in late July or early August, and two to three weeks later the soil was to be fertilized and seeded with a mixture that was half Kentucky bluegrass with some Chewings

⁶⁵ Kay Fanning, *The Mall Cultural Landscape Inventory*, Cultural Landscapes Program, National Park Service National Capital Region, 2006, 61. A few of the original Mall trees survive, particularly those located south of the Museum of Natural History as well as those relocated to the Agriculture Department grounds.

⁶⁶ A. Gude Sons Co., Inc., to Office of Supervising Architect, U.S Department of Agriculture, May 6, 1931; U.S. Grant III, Director, Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital to James A. Wetmore, Acting Supervising Architect, Treasury Department, June 27, 1931, Department of Agriculture, 1926-33, General Correspondence and Related Records, 1910-1939, Records of the Public Buildings Service, RG 121, Entry 31, Box 381, National Archives, College Park, MD. These trees no longer survive.

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Fescue and Redtop.⁶⁷ Photographs record that the lawn was planted in soybeans as recommended by Taylor (see Figures 27-28).⁶⁸

Jurisdiction over the center portion of the Agriculture Grounds was transferred in 1934 from the Agriculture Department to the National Park Service, a federal agency established in 1916 and made responsible for implementing the redevelopment of the Mall. The Agriculture Department retained jurisdiction of its buildings south of Jefferson Drive and over the area where its greenhouses were located immediately south of B Street, N.W. (now Constitution Avenue).

Construction of the South Building, 1930-1936

Almost as soon as the site for the Administration Building was chosen in 1904, Department of Agriculture officials contemplated an eventual expansion south across B Street, S.W. From the outset, Secretary Wilson considered the site on the south side of the Mall too narrow to accommodate all the Department's facility needs and advocated purchasing properties in the squares south of B Street. Over the years, an increasing number of Agriculture Department employees were located in rented buildings in those squares. The Public Buildings Act, which had funded the completion of the Administration Building, also authorized the purchase of properties in those squares and the phased construction of a large federal building there.

First known as the Extensible Building and later renamed the South Building, the project was initially conceived as a phased undertaking that would be constructed piecemeal on three squares south of B Street between Twelfth and Fourteenth streets, S.W. It was an enormous task, which entailed the acquisition of three squares' worth of properties, the closing of two streets (Thirteenth Street and Linwood Place, S.W.), and the construction of a seven-story building containing approximately 4,500 rooms. The building was designed to be constructed in phases as properties were acquired, hence the name "extensible." Construction began in 1930 and the building was completed in 1936 (see Figures 29 through 32).⁶⁹

Construction of Bridges, 1936

Before 1930, B Street, S.W., was a two-lane street with residential and small office buildings on the south side. It was subsequently widened to create the re-named Independence Avenue in 1934. Although the Department of Agriculture tentatively planned to close B Street to allow for a physical, ground-floor connection between their two buildings, they abandoned the plan in

⁶⁷ W. A. Taylor, Memorandum for Dr. Stockberger, January 28, 1931, attached to letter from W.W. Stockberger, USDA, to Ferry K. Heath, Treasury Department, General Correspondence and Related Records, 1910-39, Department of Agriculture, 1926-33. Records of the Public Buildings Service, RG 121, Entry 31, Box 380, National Archives, College Park, MD.

⁶⁸ The Still Pictures Division, National Archives, College Park has a number of photographs of the lawn preparation and planting in the Records of the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, RG-16-G.

⁶⁹ Erin E. Brasell, National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form, "Extensible Building." Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C., May 12, 2006.

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favor of two enclosed, pedestrian bridges. The bridges were initially designed with a triple set of arches, with were simplified into a single span, allowing for Independence Avenue to remain unbroken across its breadth (see Figures 33 and 34). The bridges were constructed in 1936.

Even before they were completed, the twin bridges were dedicated to the memories of two men who were influential to the development of the Department of Agriculture. The eastern bridge, nearest Twelfth Street, S.W. was dedicated to Dr. Seaman A. Knapp, an early promoter of farm demonstration work and the father of the agricultural extension service. The western bridge was dedicated to James Wilson, whose thirteen-year tenure as Secretary of the Department of Agriculture placed him in the cabinets of Presidents McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, and Taft. Naming of the bridges was approved by the Seventy-Third Congress and by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1934.⁷⁰

The construction of the bridges allowed the south elevations of the east and west wings to be finally completed. When the wings were occupied in 1907, it was intended that the building might at some point be extended across B Street. To prepare for this eventuality, the wing endings terminated abruptly as they met B Street, faced only with brick cladding and ornamented with ungainly metal fire escapes. To complete the wings, the windows were removed and the marble carried around from the east and west walls. The centermost bay of each south wall was clad in limestone to match the cladding on the bridges. The roof of the building was tapered back to continue the setback on the flanking sides.

Subsequent Alterations

After the completion of the Administration and South Buildings in 1936, NCPPC and the Department of Agriculture explored various options for relieving traffic congestion, increasing the capacity for automobile parking, and making associated planting changes on the sites. Between the late 1930s and the 1960s, both circular drives near the east and west wings were converted to parking lots. The General Services Administration produced landscape plans in 1967 and 1978 that recommended changes in planting, paving certain areas of the site (including the west parking lot in 1967), and installing or relocating automobile entrances. Although the general character of the Olmsted-designed north lawn remained intact, the density and diversity of plantings in this area has gradually increased over time.

A modernization and restoration of the building was completed in the early 1990s that included cosmetic and mechanical upgrades, as well as various other changes. Lighting fixtures in the corridors and offices were replaced and suspended acoustic ceiling tiles installed, predominantly in the offices. The courtyard skylight was also restored to replicate its original appearance.

⁷⁰ Information derived from memorial bronze plaques located on each bridge.

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Olmsted Brothers, Landscape Architects

The venerable Olmsted firm, responsible for the landscape design of the Administration Building site, was effectively founded in 1858 when Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. (1822-1903) partnered with Calvert Vaux to win the competition to design New York City's Central Park. Olmsted, whose early career as a writer and editor had distinguished him as a leading social critic, was also a conservationist who advocated for the establishment of what would become the American West's great national parks, particularly Yosemite. Following the completion of Central Park, Olmsted went on to design a number of large, urban parks and park systems, the former including Prospect Park in Brooklyn (1866), Riverside Park in New York (1875), and Belle Isle in Detroit (1881), and the latter including Buffalo, Boston, and Louisville. With Vaux, Olmsted originated the concept of a "parkway," a landscaped greenway designed to separate automobile and pedestrian traffic. Throughout his career, Olmsted was a tireless advocate for the power of parks to affect the emotions, to provide a respite from the stress of urban life, and to preserve scenic beauty from commercial exploitation.⁷¹

Olmsted, Sr. retired from the firm in 1897, at which time his stepson John Charles (1852-1920) and son Frederick Jr. (1870-1957) assumed partnership; the firm was renamed Olmsted Brothers in 1898, a name that would outlive both brothers.⁷² The partnership greatly expanded Olmsted Sr.'s original scope and mission. Olmsted, Jr. in particular advanced the institutionalism of the landscape architecture profession. During his education, he had assisted his father on some of the firm's most auspicious commissions, including designs for the Biltmore Estate and the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. He was a cofounder of both the American Society of Landscape Architects and the American Institute of Planners (he served as president of both organizations), and at Harvard University helped create the country's first university course in the field.

The Olmsted Brothers' largest projects in Washington, D.C., such as the expansion of Rock Creek Park and their work on various academic campuses, were in keeping with the picturesque and naturalistic principles of the firm's founder. Despite these informal tendencies, the work of the firm had always revealed a propensity to incorporate formal elements, particularly when the landscapes were set around monumental and classical buildings. Olmsted, Sr.'s designs for the U.S. Capitol, for example, created informal groupings of trees that also reinforced the symmetry of the building as well as axial views from the radiating boulevards.

Olmsted, Jr. later defended his father's work on the Capitol (against the greater formality advocated by prevailing tastes) and reiterated those views. In a paper delivered at the 1900 AIA conference, he stated, "great public edifices must be strongly formal, whether they are perfectly

⁷¹ Charles E. Beveridge, "Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.," in *Pioneers of American Landscape Design*, ed. Charles A. Birnbaum and Robin Karson (New York: McGraw Hill, 2000), 277-281.

⁷² John and Frederick were half-brothers; Olmsted, Sr. married John's mother following the death of her first husband. Olmsted, Jr. became the firm's senior partner in 1920 following John's death; he remained in that position until his retirement in 1950.

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symmetrical or not, and this formal quality ought to be recognized in the plan of their surroundings if the total effect is to be consistent... where the scale of the scheme is large, there should be a corresponding simplicity.”⁷³ Delivered on the eve of the formation of the McMillan Commission, these remarks would crucially inform the Commission’s plans. As a member not only of the Commission itself, but also of the CFA (1910-1918) and the NCPPC (1926-1932), Olmsted was intimately involved with the implementation of those plans, which took place over a protracted period as funding became available. Moreover, as a private practitioner, Olmsted’s firm received numerous commissions for sites in Washington developed under the auspices of the Commission plan.

The Olmsteds completed many projects in and around the District of Columbia.⁷⁴ Grounds of public buildings and plazas included the White House (1903), Capitol (1903-1904), Union Station (1903-1906), Bureau of Standards (1907-1908), and National Museum (1905), among others. They designed the grounds of the district’s two most prominent religious buildings, the National Cathedral (1905-1927) and National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception (1953-1967). They were responsible for the design of the grounds of the Grant (1906-1908; 1920) and Washington (1930-1933) Monuments. Park commissions included the National Zoo (1889-1905), National Mall (1901-1915), McMillan Park (1907-1911) Potomac Park (1907-1910; 1922), Rock Creek Park (1907-1945), U.S. Botanic Garden/National Arboretum (1917-1945; 1953), and Roosevelt Island (1925). Academic and residential campuses included St. Elizabeths Hospital Grounds (1901), the Catholic University of America (1914-1933), Saint Joseph’s Seminary (1925-1958), and the George Washington University (1949).⁷⁵

Rankin, Kellogg & Crane (1903-1925) / Rankin & Kellogg (1891-1903; 1925-1943), Architects

Rankin, Kellogg & Crane was a prominent, Philadelphia-based architecture firm that ranked among the foremost practitioners of the Beaux Arts style in the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. The firm achieved success and acclaim for its active participation in public design competitions, many of which led to auspicious commissions, including the U.S. Courthouse and

⁷³ Quoted in David C. Streatfield, “The Olmsteds and the Landscape of the Mall,” in *The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991*, ed. Richard Longstreth, (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 122.

⁷⁴ The sites, buildings, monuments, and parks listed above represent projects for which the Olmsted Brothers received commissions and prepared plans. Some of these projects, like the master plan for the National Zoological Park, were carried over from earlier work completed by Olmsted, Sr. or his partners. Other projects, like the Washington Monument Grounds, were never or only partially carried out, usually due to a lack of funding.

⁷⁵ The work of the Olmsteds has been extensively documented, and many of the sites designed by the firm have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The most numerous of these are the academic campuses, public parks, historic residential suburbs, and country estates designed by them in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A number of sites located within the District of Columbia are listed in the National Register, and many have acquired significance in whole or in part through their association with the Olmsted firm.

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Post Office in Indianapolis (1900), the U.S. Post Office in Philadelphia (1903), and the Camden County Courthouse in Camden, New Jersey (1904-1906).⁷⁶

Founded in 1891, the firm was the product of the partnership of John Hall Rankin (1868-1952) and Thomas M. Kellogg (1862-1935), both former students of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) school of architecture. Rankin & Kellogg's broad range of commissions included hotels, office and commercial buildings, cultural institutions, and churches in cities throughout the Mid-Atlantic region. Although the firm also accepted private residential commissions, the bulk of their work was centered on public commercial, institutional, and cultural projects. In 1903, Rankin & Kellogg was expanded to include Edward A. Crane (1867-1935), another MIT graduate who had been previously employed by the Office of the Supervising Architect. Located within the Treasury Department, the Supervising Architect's Office was responsible for the design and construction of most U.S. government buildings, including courthouses, customs houses, post offices, mints, and other federal buildings nationwide. It is likely that Rankin, Kellogg & Crane leveraged Crane's connection to the Supervising Architect's office to secure projects funded by the Treasury Department. Crane left the partnership in 1925 for private practice, and its name reverted to Rankin & Kellogg.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Sandra L. Tatman, "Rankin & Kellogg," *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Directory*. Retrieved January 28, 2014, http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/26268.

⁷⁷ Sheryl Jaslow, National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form, "United States Post Office—Main Branch." Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C., July 27, 2005, 8:7-8.

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SIGNIFICANCE AND EVALUATION

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

Agriculture

The Administration Building is significant for its association with the growth of the Department of Agriculture in the first four decades of the twentieth century. Between 1897 and 1936, the Department of Agriculture underwent an unprecedented expansion of programs and reorganization of its bureaucratic structure. It oversaw the implementation of such momentous and far-reaching pieces of legislation as the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 and the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933. During this time, the agriculture industry became increasingly scientific, regulated, and mechanized. For these reasons, the Department expanded its focus and resources towards ensuring the livelihood of farmers through subsidies, price control, surplus crop storage, land conservation, and cooperative resource management.

Secretary James Wilson and the Agriculture Building Committee worked closely with architects and legislators to ensure that their new headquarters building would meet the agency's programmatic needs and that its stateliness would reflect the import of the American farmer and his crop. Since its completion in 1930, the central portion of the building has served as the administrative heart of the Department of Agriculture and has housed the office of every Secretary of Agriculture. Further, it remains the only building facing the National Mall to house a Cabinet-level department. Therefore, the Whitten Building is significant under Criterion A for its association with the role the Department of Agriculture had in the development of modern agriculture, and for its reflection of the Department's long history of development on the National Mall.

Additionally, the Olmsted-designed landscape of the Whitten Building site represents the culmination of more than a century of USDA's cultivation of the National Mall. Beginning in 1856, the Department established greenhouses and a propagating garden on what is now the site of the West Wing of the National Gallery of Art. Other Department of Agriculture sites on the Mall expanded to include a formal garden, an arboretum, additional greenhouses, subsidiary service buildings, educational garden plots, and two iterations of a departmental headquarters building. Collectively, the gardens strove to accomplish the USDA mission of education and agricultural innovation. Although many of these features are no longer extant, the landscape today is significant as it reflects the institutional values of USDA during the period of time when the agency was becoming increasingly bureaucratic, politically influential, and focused on modernization of agricultural practices and subsidies. Therefore, the Whitten Building landscape is significant under Criterion A for its association with the history of the major government agency as well as its development on the National Mall.

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Community Planning and Development

Both the Whitten Building and its landscape are significant under Criterion A for their representation of broad patterns of development in Washington, D.C., particularly in the design and construction of its monumental core. Following the release of the McMillan Plan in 1902, little action was taken towards its implementation; indeed, no authoritative mechanism or funding existed to do so. Only after the formation of two oversight bodies (CFA in 1910 and NCPPC in 1926) were those sympathetic to the plan given the authority to enforce it. Funding and manpower from the New Deal further enabled development.

Before these agencies were created, however, projects like the Department of Agriculture Administration Building represented an opportunity to realize the central tenet of the McMillan Plan: the reshaping of the Mall into a greensward lined by trees and monumental civic buildings. Constructed between 1904 and 1930, the Administration Building was one of the first on the National Mall whose siting and architecture were direct reactions to the guidelines of the McMillan Plan. Its façade aligned with the 445-foot setback from the Mall's center; its height was reduced to conform to the plan; and its landscape was designed to contrast the strict formality of the Mall and to complement the architecture of the building.

On a smaller scale, the landscape of the Administration Building solved several technical problems presented by the completion of the Mall. The excavation of Federal Triangle, then under development, provided fill to level the Mall, particularly within the bounds of the entire Agriculture Grounds between Twelfth and Fourteenth streets and Independence and Constitution avenues. That same area also provided the mature and specimen trees that were transplanted to the new Administration Building lawns. Olmsted and others, recognizing that the wholesale destruction of those trees would be unpopular, devised a solution that would both salvage healthy plants and provide mature vegetation for the Administration Building site. The completion of both the Mall and the Administration Building Grounds were conceived and accomplished as one holistic unit, each relying on the other to meet aesthetic and practical goals.

The planning, design, and completion of the Whitten Building and its surrounding landscape were closely related to the implementation of the McMillan Plan for the National Mall. Therefore, the property is significant under Criterion A for its role in the implementation of the McMillan Plan over a period of more than thirty years.

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.

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Architecture

The Whitten Building is architecturally significant under Criterion C as an exceptional example of the Beaux Arts style. In the United States, Beaux Arts dominated the design of civic and cultural buildings during the first three decades of the twentieth century. The style was derived from the teachings of the *École des Beaux Arts* in Paris, which became a model for the early development and direction of professional architecture schools throughout the United States. With a foundation in classical Roman and Renaissance architecture, the Beaux Arts style was based on a highly refined sense of order, proportion, hierarchy, axial symmetry, and monumentality. The most elaborate examples of the Beaux Arts canon featured lavish building materials, highly detailed surficial ornamentation, and integration of complementary decorative arts.

Along with the Wilson Building, the New National Museum, the Corcoran Gallery, and other examples, the Whitten Building was among the first of a generation of Beaux Arts edifices whose style would dictate the growth of Washington until World War II, backed by the considerable influence of the McMillan Plan. Although they experienced a twenty-six year gap between the initial design of the building and its completion, Rankin, Kellogg & Crane managed to unite the three pieces of the Administration Building into a highly unified and coherent façade that exemplified the Beaux Arts values of hierarchy, symmetry, and proportion. The building incorporated several pieces of decorative art—the mural by Gilbert White and the sculptures by A.A. Weinman and John Flanagan—that together embodied the Beaux Arts ideal of unity of the arts. Therefore, the Whitten Building is significant under Criterion C as one of the first of the immense, neoclassical government buildings to be designed in the twentieth century. It was precedent-setting and became a model on which later monumental departmental headquarters were based, including those in the Federal Triangle and Northwest Rectangle. Correspondingly, the planned informality of the Olmsted landscape became a model on which other landscapes were developed, both for public buildings and parks in the vicinity of the National Mall.

Landscape Architecture

The Whitten Building property is also significant under Criterion C for its association with the Olmsted Brothers. At the time, they were the largest and most prominent landscape architecture firm in the country, with an illustrious history that dated to Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.'s collaboration on the design of Central Park in the 1850s. Olmsted, Jr., who became a partner in the firm in 1897, was intricately involved in the development of Washington, D.C.'s monumental core, both through his role on the McMillan Commission and through his firm's work on multiple projects within the capital region. Although the Olmsted firm was generally associated with picturesque and naturalistic landscapes, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.'s design philosophy specified that plantings should respond to the architectural character of the buildings they were intended to enhance. Beaux Arts buildings, therefore, were best served by landscapes that highlighted and reinforced their inherent symmetry, axiality, and grandiosity.

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Housed in the Olmsted Archives, numerous drawings document the extensive design process that Olmsted, Jr. underwent to arrive at the completed design for the Administration Building landscape. Careful thought influenced the grading of the lands, the size and placement of trees, the scale and effect of open spaces, and the path of driveways. Designs were tested both in plan and in perspective, which allowed Olmsted to judge the effect of his designs against the recently completed Administration Building. One component of the plan that was designed but never implemented was a series of ornamental paths and gardens set along the northern face of the building. These gardens flanked paths that connected the central block to the outer corners of the site. The gardens—for which numerous study drawings exist—illustrate Olmsted’s desire to mediate the formality of the building’s Beaux-Arts architecture with the more loosely organized landscape. The gardens were scrapped but the final design was closely in keeping with Olmsted’s aesthetic philosophy, which advocated for simplicity of form in designs tailored to the grandiosity of the buildings that the landscapes were meant to serve. Therefore, the landscape is significant under Criterion C as a thoughtfully executed and highly representative example of the work for which the Olmsted Brothers were renowned (see Figure 35 for a diagram of extant, Olmsted-era trees).

Assessment of Integrity

Integrity is defined as the ability of a property to convey its historic significance. The National Register identifies the following seven aspects used in the assessment of historic integrity: location, design, setting, materials, association, workmanship, and feeling. A property need not retain all seven aspects, but it must retain those that relate directly to its area and period of significance.

Since its completion, the Whitten Building has undergone several minor alterations, focused on the interior of the east and west wings and on the surrounding landscape. On the interior, the former laboratories located in the wings have been converted for office use. On the exterior, plant material has evolved and matured over time, intensity of site planting has increased, minor architectural elements have been added, and uses in certain portions of the site have changed. However, the exterior of the Whitten Building and its principal, public interior spaces have retained a remarkably high degree of architectural integrity. Therefore, the Whitten Building property has retained sufficient integrity to convey its historic significance under National Register Criteria A and C.

Location: The place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred.

The Whitten Building site retains its integrity of location as it remains in the place of its original construction. The choice of site was crucial in the development of the department headquarters: facing the National Mall and in close proximity to the existing buildings operated by USDA.

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Additionally, the specific siting of the building was dictated by the requirements of the McMillan Commission Plan, which determined the exact setback of the Administration Building and, therefore, how much of the property was reserved for plants and open space. These basic elements have not changed. Therefore, the Whitten Building property has retained its integrity of location.

Setting: The physical environment of a historic property.

At the time of the Whitten Building's completion, the landscape of the adjacent Mall was taking shape, with the land cleared and graded and a majority of the Elm allée planted. Other buildings had been planned or constructed that were aligned with the formal requirements of the McMillan Plan. Over the next several decades, this trend would continue. The Whitten Building and its landscape, designed in accordance with the plan, were intended to reflect and reinforce this setting. Other buildings completed prior to the McMillan Plan, including the Freer Gallery, the Smithsonian Institution Castle, and the Sidney Yates Building (formerly the Auditors Building), are still present around the Whitten Building site. Therefore, the Whitten Building property has retained its integrity of setting.

Design: The combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of the property.

The Beaux Arts architectural vocabulary was extremely rigorous in all aspects of a building's planning, from its size and orientation, to its sense of proportion and hierarchy, to its material character. The intended effect was one of great formality, which was appropriate both for the building's setting and for its use as the headquarters of the Department of Agriculture. In contrast, the design of the surrounding landscape was intended to present a planned informality, a foil both to the building itself as well as to the homogenous planting plan of the National Mall. The designed elements that contributed to these qualities and formed the building's style, size, configuration, and hierarchy, from the grandiosity of its dodecastyle Roman Corinthian portico to its interior progression of rooms, has been retained.

Similarly, the design of the north lawn has retained its essential Olmsted design of broad lawns punctuated by groupings of mature trees and shrubs. On the east and west sides of the property, paved parking lots have encroached on the lawns, circular drives, and planting that existed during the period of significance. The south parking lots facing Independence Avenue were not within the scope of the Olmsted Brothers' designs for the Administration Building. Nevertheless, they are significant as they are the last remnants of the utilitarian buildings and grounds that once existed extensively across the site. Both the Alcohol and Mechanical Buildings were constructed during the period of significance to serve the Administration Building, and they retain their integrity. Their surrounding sites have continuously been used as service lots, especially as parking as the need to accommodate automobiles increased over time. These areas retain a high degree of design integrity.

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Therefore, the Whitten Building and its landscape retain varying degrees of integrity of design. Overall, this contributes to a moderate degree of design integrity.

Materials: The physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property.

The materials employed to construct the Whitten Building were intended to reflect and reinforce the grandeur of its Beaux Arts design. Several varieties of marble, granite, limestone, and bronze were used throughout the building in the creation of an edifice that was monumental without being ostentatious. Throughout the building, those materials are overwhelmingly intact and are in good or fair condition. Even the less expensive, more utilitarian aspects of the building's design, particularly the metal or wood windows found throughout, have survived from the building's completion and have sustained their utility. Therefore, the Whitten Building itself has retained its integrity of materials.

The materials of the Whitten Building landscape have evolved over time, but have retained their basic character. The Ceremonial Entry Court and north lawn retain high degrees of historic integrity, particularly relating to their hardscape elements. The essential materials of stone, lawn, predominantly deciduous trees and shrubs, and asphalt paving have remained intact. On the east and west lawns, hardscape—and particularly asphalt parking areas—has been introduced or greatly expanded. New plant materials have also been introduced, particularly those associated with the organic garden. Therefore, these areas have retained a low degree of integrity. The south parking courts have similarly been altered with the addition of new hardscape, although these areas were historically paved. The two buildings within these areas have retained their original cladding. Therefore, the Whitten Building landscape has retained a moderate degree of integrity of materials.

Workmanship: The physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory.

The architectural character of the Whitten Building is overwhelmingly expressed through its marble and granite façade. The Department of Agriculture and supporters of the McMillan Plan lobbied for a stone façade and for the dignity and monumentality it would convey, as opposed to cheaper brick or terra cotta. Stone was more expensive not only to quarry, but also to carve. Further, the White, Weinman, and Flanagan artworks throughout the building convey that period's emphasis on the integration of art and architecture. These works, in addition to the building's marble and granite cladding, are remarkably intact and, therefore, the building has retained a high degree of integrity of workmanship.

Workmanship is a difficult quality to define for historic landscapes, but it is interpreted here to mean the level of care taken in the maintenance of the property's plant material. As completed in 1931, the lawns and trees of the landscape had a pristine quality. The lawn was kept smooth and featureless, and the trees were maintained as specimens. Currently, the trees and shrubs are

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more numerous and are maintained to less stringent standards. Although the extant lawn surface has retained its character through careful maintenance, it has been encroached upon by low-maintenance groundcover and shrubs. For these reasons, the Whitten Building landscape has retained a low degree of integrity of workmanship.

Association: The direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property.

The property is significant for its illustration of a series of formative events in the development of Washington and the Department of Agriculture: the work of the McMillan Commission; the department's growth in the early twentieth century, and the skill of prominent architects and landscape architects at the heights of their careers. Architecturally and artistically, the Whitten Building and its site were designed to complement a greater vision, both of aesthetics in general and the development of Washington in particular, realized through its strict Beaux Arts siting and design. A component of this design was the integration of artwork throughout the building—A.A. Weinman's sculptural groupings and Gilbert White's paintings—which made reference to the work and legacy of the Department of Agriculture. The strength of these artistic endeavors, paired with the department's continued occupation of the building, has allowed the property to retain a very high degree of integrity of association.

The landscape itself is significant for its illustration of a series of formative events in the development of Washington, D.C.: including the work of the McMillan Commission and the later steps that were taken to implement its plan. Prominent practitioners including the Olmsted Brothers were charged with designing individual properties that conformed to the plan's overall vision. Both the Whitten Building and its surrounding landscape were designed to complement the plan and facilitate functionality for pedestrians and cars accessing and moving through the site. Certain elements, like the circular drives that once existed on the East and West Wings, are no longer extant. However, the landscape's basic appearance and character are sufficient to convey its historic associations, both with the Olmsted firm and with the development of the National Mall. Therefore, the Whitten Building landscape has retained a moderate degree of integrity of association.

Feeling: A property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period.

Nearly every aspect of the Whitten Building's design was a response to the highly regimented requirements of Beaux Arts architecture and the McMillan Plan. The building's specific siting, proportion, detail, and materials conformed to these idealized visions. These qualities reflected that generation's aesthetic sensibilities, which valued order and classical character above all else. The landscape around the Whitten Building was consciously designed to create an artificial informality that highlighted the Beaux Arts character of the National Mall and the Whitten Building. Extensive lawns interspersed with trees provided a platform to frame and enhance views toward the site. Despite alterations to this landscape, the building and its site retain the

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aesthetic sense of the Beaux Arts and City Beautiful movements and, therefore, the property has retained a moderate degree of integrity of feeling.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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- National Agricultural Library, Beltsville, MD, Still Images, Textual Records
- National Archives, College Park, MD, Cartographic, Still Picture, and Textual Divisions
- Record Groups 16 (Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture); 18 (Records of
the Army Air Forces); 79 (Records of the National Park Service); and 121 (Records of
the Public Buildings Service).

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property 6.8 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 38.888369° | Longitude: -77.031826° |
| 2. Latitude: 38.888440° | Longitude: -77.028352° |
| 3. Latitude: 38.887566° | Longitude: -77.028322° |
| 4. Latitude: 38.887591° | Longitude: -77.031835° |

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Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Administration Building is located at Twelfth Street and Jefferson Drive, S.W. in Washington, D.C. The property is bounded by Independence Avenue, Jefferson Drive, and Fourteenth and Twelfth streets, S.W.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The described property lines remain as they existed at the time of the building's construction. The nomination includes all property historically associated with the building during the period of significance. Jurisdiction over the northern portion of the property was transferred to the National Park Service in 1934, but neither the property's federal ownership nor its physical boundaries have changed.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Bill Marzella, Historic Preservation Planner

organization: EHT Tracerics, Inc.

street & number: 1121 5th Street, N.W.

city or town: Washington state: DC zip code: 20001

e-mail: bill.marzella@tracerics.com

telephone: (202) 393-1199

date: August 5, 2015

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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Photograph Log

Name of Property: U.S. Department of Agriculture Administration Building (Boundary Increase and Additional Documentation)

City or Vicinity: Washington, D.C.

County: Washington

State: District of Columbia

Photographer: EHT Tracerics

Date Photographed: June 2013 and January 2014

Location of Original Digital Files: 1121 5th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001

Number of Photographs: 19

Photo #0001: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0001.tif
Exterior; north elevation across National Mall, camera facing south

Photo #0002: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0002.tif
Exterior; north elevation with surrounding landscape, camera facing southeast

Photo #0003: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0003.tif
Exterior; north elevation of center block with ceremonial entry drive, camera facing southeast

Photo #0004: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0004.tif
Exterior; detail of north elevation of center block with upper plaza, camera facing southeast

Photo #0005: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0005.tif
Exterior; west elevation of west wing, camera facing southeast

Photo #0006: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0006.tif
Exterior; south elevation, camera facing northwest

Photo #0007: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0007.tif
Exterior; south and east elevation of west wing, camera facing west

Photo #0008: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0008.tif
Exterior; detail of south elevation of east wing with areaway and Alcohol Building, camera facing north

Photo #0009: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0009.tif
Exterior; south and west elevations of center block and west wing with Mechanical Building, camera facing northeast

Photo #0010: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0010.tif
Exterior; detail of east wing pediment, camera facing south

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Photo #0011: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0011.tif
Exterior; detail of east wing basement and areaway, camera facing north

Photo #0012: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0012.tif
Exterior; Administration Building north lawn landscape, camera facing southeast

Photo #0013: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0013.tif
Exterior; Administration Building north lawn landscape, camera facing east

Photo #0014: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0014.tif
Exterior; Administration Building north lawn landscape, camera facing west

Photo #0015: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0015.tif
Exterior; south elevation and detail of west bridge, camera facing northeast

Photo #0016: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0016.tif
Exterior; Administration Building (left), South Building (right), and bridges along
Independence Avenue, camera facing east

Photo #0017: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0017.tif
Interior; courtyard from second floor, camera facing northwest

Photo #0018: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0018.tif
Interior; stair and elevator lobby, first floor, camera facing east

Photo #0019: DC_USDA Admin Building Amendment_0019.tif
Interior; groin-vaulted corridor, first floor, camera facing east

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.