

F O R T D R I V E

Plan for a Parkway Connecting the Civil War Forts and Encircling the
City of Washington

NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

Prepared as a Supplement to a Report on the
Park System for the District of Columbia,

In Accordance with Vote of the Commission, December, 1926,

by

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I. Introduction

The Civil War Forts around Washington were built on hills and ridges which commanded distant views. The historic interest attaching to the "Defenses of Washington" and the remarkable views obtainable from the old Forts has led to a demand that these sites should be held by the public for park purposes and that a connecting drive should be built between them.

A Fort Drive appears on the Highway Plan of 1898. The preservation of Fort sites and the connection of the Forts were advocated in the Report of the Senate Park Commission of 1901. More recently, the need of a Fort Drive was used as one of the chief arguments for the establishment of the National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

This Commission is already embarked upon a policy of saving the sites of the Civil War Forts and of providing connections between them. These connections may be provided in the form of specially treated City streets, - with extra width, distinctive planting, and restricted to pleasure vehicles. Or it may be provided in the form of a park drive, - a wide right-of-way, curving roads, and including bits of existing woodland along the way.

In order to test the relative merits and costs of these two methods of providing connections between the forts, this report has been prepared. The subject is discussed under the following headings.

- II Description of Forts
- III Connections by a Park Driveway
- IV Connections by Streets
- V Estimates of cost of land
- VI Summary

II - DESCRIPTION OF FORTS

No better account of the sites and development of the Civil War Forts about Washington can be asked than that contained in the report of Major General J. G. Barnard on "The Defenses of Washington" published 1871:

"The system of works constituting what are called the defenses of Washington may be divided into four groups:

"First. Those south of the Potomac, commencing with Fort Lyon below Alexandria, and terminating with Fort De Kalb opposite Georgetown.

"Second. Those of the Chain Bridge.

"Third. Those north of the Potomac, between that river and the Anacostia, commencing with Fort Sumner and terminating with Fort Lincoln.

"Fourth. Those south of the Eastern Branch, commencing with Fort Mahan, and terminating with Fort Greble, nearly opposite Alexandria.

bluff including the sites of Forts Carroll and Greble to Blue Plains. The project for this parkway has already been tentatively approved by the Commission without regard to its relation to the Fort Drive scheme.

From Blue Plains two routes are projected for a parkway to Forts Foote and Washington along the lower Potomac.

SUMMARY.

"This Commission can, I believe,* today establish such a continuous drive, wholly within the Federal District. At the receiving reservoir it would connect with the projected drive along the upper Potomac, contrasting sharply with the lower river through its rapids, picturesque islands, ancient canal, and rock cliffs, reaching the waterfall of which Ambassador Bryce said: 'No European city has so noble a cataract in its vicinity as the Great Falls of the Potomac, a magnificent piece of scenery which you will, of course, always preserve' ".

Starting from the splendid woods skirting the Receiving Reservoir the Fort Drive would traverse a wooded valley and ridge to Battery Kemble, thence past Fort Reno to and through upper Rock Creek Park with its historic Fort De Russy, reaching the still more historic Fort Stevens on the eastern side, thence Fort Slocum, Fort Totten, (Fort Bunker Hill), the very striking and exceptional view at Fort Lincoln, crossing the Anacostia River, and including Fort Mahan, Fort Sedgwick, Fort Dupont, Fort Davis, Fort Baker, Fort Stanton, and reaching the Potomac River again at Fort Carroll. There is reached the prospective river drive with its continuous view of the Potomac, passing Fort Greble, Fort Foote, and terminating at Fort Washington."

This drive covers a distance of some twenty-two and eight-tenths miles from Conduit Road to Blue Plains.

"If a Senator, Representative, diplomat, or any citizen, starts out with his family or with visitors to Washington, and can pick up such a drive at any point and find himself on a continuous, unbroken, easily followed, wooded road, covering the entire distance or any part of it that he may choose, this, it seems to me, would constitute the most famous and striking and well-known parkway in this section; and such a drive, if properly designed, would constitute by all means the most striking feature of our park system."

V. SUMMARY.

From the estimates in Appendix A, it appears that the assessed value of land and buildings to provide a connection between the Civil War Forts by a Park Driveway substantially as outlined in Part III of this report, amounts to \$914,806. A conservative estimate of the actual cost of the real estate either by direct purchase, or through condemnation proceedings amounts to \$2,000,000.

* From a letter by Mr. F. G. Coldren, Nov. 30, 1926.