

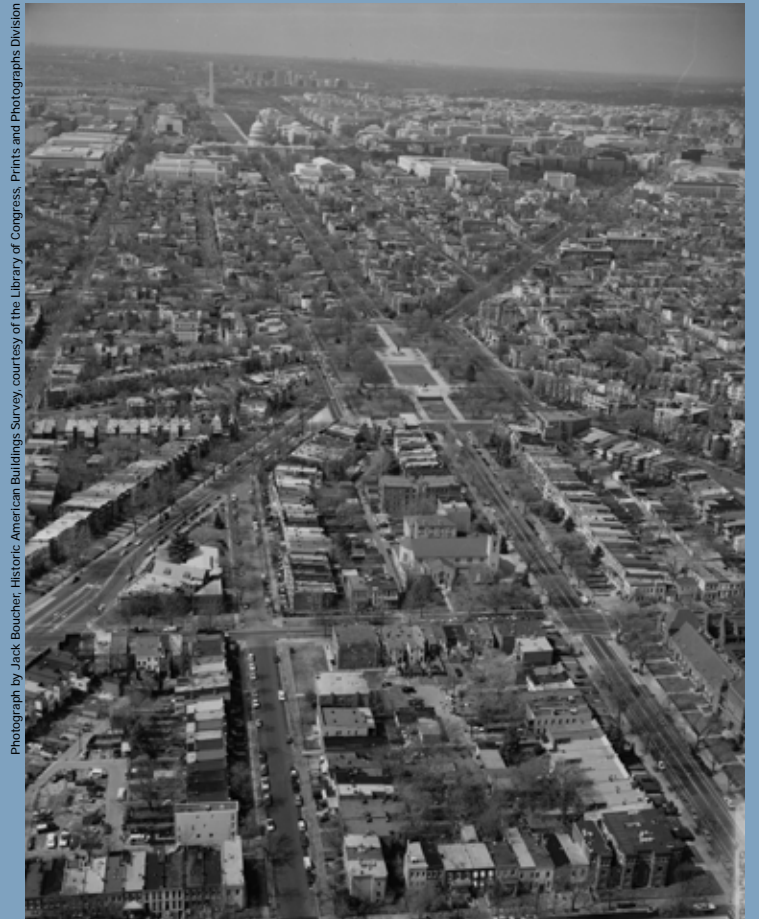
The L'Enfant Plan

Virginia Avenue SE

The design for the street grid for the City of Washington, DC was based upon the artistic baroque L'Enfant Plan, developed and drafted by Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant (1754-1825), a French engineer who served in the Revolutionary War. After the war, President George Washington granted a request by L'Enfant to develop a plan for the new capital city. Inspired by the gardens at the Palace of Versailles, L'Enfant proposed an orthogonal grid of north-south streets (with numbers as their names) and east-west streets (with letters as their names). A series of diagonal avenues (named after states of the union such as Virginia Avenue) were superimposed over the grid.

The diagonal avenues were aligned with monuments and landmark buildings creating important vistas. The middle portion of the plan contained ceremonial parks and green spaces with the United States Capitol Building at the center point. The major meeting points of the orthogonal and diagonal streets contain monumental circles. Numerous small triangular-shaped parks and reservations occur at other intersections.

The L'Enfant Plan was completed gradually over a period of more than one hundred years. Later, in 1901-1902, the McMillan Commission Plan proposed changes to the Mall while respecting the L'Enfant Plan. Together, these two plans are referred to collectively as "The Plan of the City of Washington."



Photograph by Jack Boucher, Historic American Buildings Survey, courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

This 1992 aerial image shows the skillful planning approach established by L'Enfant, which included a street grid superimposed with wide, radiating avenues. These avenues allow uninterrupted views to significant monuments and buildings in Washington, DC. Lincoln Park is located in the center of the photograph with the U.S. Capitol and the Washington Monument in the background.



For more detailed information, scan the QR code to the left to access the Historic American Building Survey documentation of the L'Enfant-McMillan Plan of Washington, DC at the Library of Congress or go to www.loc.gov/pictures/item/dc0776.



Major Pierre L'Enfant. L'Enfant is buried at Arlington National Cemetery on the hill east of Arlington House.

The 1818 map of the city of Washington in the District of Columbia illustrating the L'Enfant Plan of gridded streets and diagonal avenues.

