

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED APR 7 1981  
MAY 18 1981  
DATE ENTEREDSEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Mount Vernon Memorial Highway

AND/OR COMMON

George Washington Memorial Parkway (portion)

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Washington St. and George Washington  
Memorial Pkwy.

CITY, TOWN

Arlington/Alexandria/Mount Vernon

VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

8th (VA)

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Virginia: Washington, D.C.

VA-51; DC:11

Alexandria (510), Arlington (013),

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

Fairfax (059), D.C. (001)

**CATEGORY**☐ DISTRICT  
☐ BUILDING(S)  
☒ STRUCTURE  
☐ SITE  
☐ OBJECT**OWNERSHIP**☒ PUBLIC  
☐ PRIVATE  
☐ BOTH**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**☐ IN PROCESS  
☐ BEING CONSIDERED**STATUS**☒ OCCUPIED  
☐ UNOCCUPIED  
☐ WORK IN PROGRESS  
**ACCESSIBLE**  
☐ YES: RESTRICTED  
☒ YES: UNRESTRICTED  
☐ NO**PRESENT USE**☐ AGRICULTURE  
☐ COMMERCIAL  
☐ EDUCATIONAL  
☐ ENTERTAINMENT  
☐ GOVERNMENT  
☐ INDUSTRIAL  
☐ MILITARY  
☐ MUSEUM  
☒ PARK  
☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE  
☐ RELIGIOUS  
☐ SCIENTIFIC  
☒ TRANSPORTATION  
☐ OTHER:**4 AGENCY**

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (if applicable)

National Capital Region, National Park Service

STREET &amp; NUMBER

1100 Ohio Drive, S.W.

CITY, TOWN

Washington

VICINITY OF

STATE

D.C. 20242

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**COURTHOUSE.  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

same as above

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## 7 DESCRIPTION

### CONDITION

☒ EXCELLENT      ☐ DETERIORATED  
☐ GOOD            ☐ RUINS  
☐ FAIR             ☐ UNEXPOSED

### CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED  
☒ ALTERED

### CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE  
☐ MOVED      DATE \_\_\_\_\_

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, a portion of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, links the southwestern end of Arlington Memorial Bridge on Columbia Island, Washington, D.C., with Mount Vernon in Fairfax County, Va., along a route roughly paralleling the Potomac River. The highway was designed and landscaped to maximize scenic, esthetic, and commemorative qualities and retains much of its intended character.

The 8-1/2-mile section in Fairfax County from Mount Vernon north to Hunting Creek, the southern boundary of Alexandria, is the least altered portion of the highway. Much of the original concrete slab construction remains exposed on this section of the road, which is four lanes wide with occasional planted median dividers at grade separations and intersections.

At the Mount Vernon terminus is a landscaped traffic circle with flanking parking areas screened by vegetation in accordance with the original design. Facing the circle next to the gateway to George Washington's estate is the Mount Vernon Inn, a colonial revival restaurant, snack bar, and gift shop; it and a comparably designed octagonal structure in front used as a Park Police office were built in conjunction with the parkway. A bronze plaque on a boulder nearby identifies the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway and its construction for the bicentennial of Washington's birth.

A single-arch bridge with battered abutments and a decorative projecting stone course carries the highway across Little Hunting Creek where it enters the Potomac just east of Washington's estate. The alignment then curves north with the riverbank, the road running close to the river's edge as it passes Fort Washington on the Maryland shore to provide scenic views of that impressive 19th century stone fortress. A bridge of a single segmental arch bordered by battered buttress projections carries Alexandria Avenue across the parkway. At the north end of the section is the bridge over Hunting Creek, three arches between battered abutments with battered buttresses articulating the piers. All bridges are compatibly faced with varicolored rough ~~random~~ ashlar.

*Coarced*

Beveled curbing is used throughout the southern section of the highway for easy pull-off onto the adjacent grass. Guard rails where needed are of treated, unpainted wood to blend with the natural landscape. The original plantings here are most fully intact at the Mount Vernon terminus and at Belle Haven, a short distance south of Hunting Creek.

North of Hunting Creek through the Old Town section of Alexandria the parkway utilizes Washington Street, which runs straight on a nearly north-south alignment about 1-3/4 miles to just north of First Street. Laid out in the late 18th century, Washington Street is lined with many late 18th and 19th century buildings. In 1929 the city of Alexandria granted the United States a perpetual easement over the

(continued)

on #1

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Commemoration
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1929-32

BUILDER/ARCHITECT U.S. Bureau of Public Roads

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Mount Vernon Memorial Highway is significant as the first parkway constructed and maintained by the U.S. Government and as the first such road with a commemorative function explicit in its name and alignment. Although predated by other parkways, notably in Westchester County, New York, the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway south of Alexandria is probably the least altered of such early roads in the United States today. Its distinctive stone-faced arch bridges, concrete slab base, beveled curbing, and landscape plantings mark its special quality.

Planning for a highway "of noble proportions" linking Washington, D.C., with the national shrine of Mount Vernon began in 1887-88 with the formation of the Mount Vernon Avenue Association, chartered by the Commonwealth of Virginia. Pursuant to a congressional directive, Lt. Col. Peter C. Hains of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers surveyed several routes from the Virginia end of Aqueduct Bridge (predecessor of Key Bridge) to George Washington's home and tomb. Hains' vision of the nature and purpose of the road was reflected in his report; submitted in 1890:

It is to commemorate the virtues of the grandest character in American history.... A road, therefore, built from the capital of the nation to the tomb of its founder, would not be such as built for ordinary traffic. It should have the character of a monumental structure, such as would comport with the dignity of this great nation in such an undertaking, and the grandeur of character of the man to whom it is dedicated.... The grades should be light, the alignment in graceful curves, and it should pass over some of the high grounds from which the beautiful scenery along the route could be enjoyed, and possibly near the places that Washington himself frequented--places that now have a historical interest because they are associated with him.... The roadway should be well paved and well kept. It should be such a work as no American need feel ashamed of.

The highway plans received a setback in 1892 when the Washington, Alexandria, and Mount Vernon Railroad built an electric railway to Mount Vernon, reducing the functional need for the proposed road. But the concept was kept alive in the comprehensive 1902 report of the Park Improvement Commission of the District of Columbia, sponsored by the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia chaired by Senator James McMillan. The Senate Park Commission or McMillan Commission, as it was popularly known, proposed the construction of the present Arlington Memorial Bridge and recommended that a highway proceed from its southwest terminus to Mount Vernon along one of the higher and more inland routes surveyed by Hains.

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street in furtherance of the memorial highway development. The agreement conveying the easement provided, inter alia, that the United States would reconstruct and maintain Washington Street consistent with its new function as a parkway link, that Alexandria would control entering traffic to give the street precedence as a main thoroughfare, and that the city would ban facing billboards and restrict the street "to residential and business development of such character and of such type of building as will be in keeping with the dignity, purpose and memorial character" of the highway. These provisions and the city's Old and Historic Alexandria District ordinance dating from 1946 perpetuated the distinctive character of Washington Street evident today. (Washington Street and the historic buildings facing it are already included in the National Register as elements of the Alexandria Historic District; the street is included again here by virtue of the Federal interest in it as a component of the memorial highway.)

North of First Street the highway returns to the full jurisdiction of the United States and continues about 5-1/2 miles to the traffic circle at the end of Arlington Memorial Bridge. This section was and is divided by a median strip. Alterations from the original construction include asphalt paving, realignment around National Airport, widening to six lanes between the airport and the 14th Street bridges to Washington, and relocation of the southbound lane where it formerly joined the circle at the bridge. The beveled curbing continues.

For about the first 3/4-mile of this section the northbound lanes are on axis with the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C., offering motorists a striking vista to the giant obelisk over four miles distant. This slightly downsloping stretch, known as Monument View Hill, also contains remnants of the original plantings. The bridge over Four Mile Run to the north (the boundary between Alexandria and Arlington County) was constructed in the late 1970s and is not a contributing element of this nomination. A bridge like the Alexandria Avenue overpass carried the parkway on its original alignment through what is now National Airport; since the parkway was realigned west of the airport, the bridge has remained to carry internal airport traffic over an access road to the north terminal. (The bridge is now outside National Park Service jurisdiction and no longer serves the parkway, so it is not included in this nomination.) Just north of the airport the highway crosses Roaches Run on an original stone-faced box culvert. The random ashlar facing of the parkway bridges was employed by the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad in its bridge over the highway and to a lesser degree in the more recent Rochambeau and George Mason (14th Street) highway bridges paralleling the railroad to the north. A wholly modern, functional Metrorail overpass was added in the late 1970s between the railroad and highway bridges. (These spans are outside Service jurisdiction and excluded from this nomination.) A short distance beyond these overpasses the parkway crosses the Boundary Channel to Columbia

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Island, Washington, D.C., on another single arch bridge with battered buttress projections and varicolored random ashlar facing. The road proceeds along the island for about a mile to its terminus at the Arlington Memorial Bridge circle.

Although not constructed in connection with the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, the Navy-Marine Memorial adjoins it on the eastern end of Columbia Island and is included in this nomination. The memorial features a cast aluminum sculpture of a rolling wave with seven seagulls intricately balanced atop it. The base is of green granite. The memorial, approximately 30 feet long and 35 feet tall, commemorates the men of the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps who died at sea during World War I.

Approximately 1/4-mile from the Navy-Marine Memorial on the west side of the parkway is the Lyndon Baines Johnson Memorial Grove on the Potomac, a modern landscaped memorial to President Johnson. It is listed separately in the National Register.

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In 1922 Congress appropriated funds for the planning of Arlington Memorial Bridge, and in 1924 it created the United States Commission for the Celebration of the Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of George Washington. Construction of the bridge beginning in 1926 gave impetus to plans for a road linking it to Mount Vernon, and an act of Congress approved May 23, 1928, directed the survey and construction of a "suitable memorial highway" between these points under the auspices of the Washington bicentennial commission. The act ordered the Secretary of Agriculture, who had jurisdiction over the Bureau of Public Roads, to survey routes for selection by the commission and prepare highway plans with "provision for the planting of shade trees and shrubbery and for such other landscape treatment, parking, and ornamental structures as he may prescribe...."

Because of Westchester County's pioneering role in parkway design and construction, the Bureau of Public Roads hired as consultants three employees of the Westchester County Park Authority: Chief Engineer Jay Downer, Landscape Architect Gilmore D. Clarke, and Landscape Plantsman Henry Nye. The resulting design similarity to the New York parkways was evident in such features as the bridges of reinforced concrete slab and girder construction masked by native stone arches and the rustic wooden guardrails.

Two routes were chosen as alternatives, both of which were further modifications of alignments proposed by Hains. The commission ultimately selected the route nearest the Potomac, which afforded fine views of the river and the striking axial vista of the Washington Monument for traffic northbound from Alexandria--especially fitting given the highway's commemorative purpose. Construction began under the direction of the Bureau of Public Roads on September 17, 1929; the road was opened to traffic on January 16, 1932, the bicentennial year of Washington's birth. President Hoover traveled the highway to Mount Vernon that November for its formal dedication.

While the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway was still under construction, the Capper-Crampton Act of May 29, 1930, authorized the Federal acquisition of additional lands on both sides of the Potomac for the development of the George Washington Memorial Parkway. This act provided for the transfer of the completed Mount Vernon Memorial Highway to the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital--subsumed by the National Park Service in 1933--as a component of the larger parkway, which ultimately extended northwest to Great Falls on the Virginia side of the river and from Chain Bridge to Cabin John on the Maryland side. (A proposed linking bridge across the Potomac at Great Falls and an extension in Maryland south to Fort Washington were never built.) The road remains under National Park Service administration.

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With the exception of traffic lights in Alexandria, there are no impediments to the free flow of traffic on the parkway in keeping with its historic character. The highway serves as the major access to a number of scenic and recreational features along its route, including Riverside, Fort Hunt, Belle Haven, Dyke Marsh, Daingerfield Island, Gravelly Point, Roaches Run, and Collingwood.

The Navy-Marine Memorial was erected in 1934 on lands of the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway at the east end of Columbia Island, Washington, D.C. Designed by the sculptor Ernesto Begni del Piatta in 1922, the dynamic rolling wave and soaring gulls were to have rested on an elaborate stepped base of polished green granite evocative of the sea. Funds for this base were inadequate, and in 1940 the present abbreviated granite pedestal replaced the rough concrete base installed for the dedication. The cast aluminum sculpture itself is nevertheless a unique and striking specimen among Washington's abundant memorial art.



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UTM REFERENCES

A: 18/321160/4306050 (Washington West quad.)  
B: 18/323240/4304130 (Alexandria quad.)  
C: 18/322520/4303060 "  
D: 18/322220/4301500 "  
E: 18/322710/4299550 "  
F: 18/322470/4298050 "  
G: 18/321980/4295410 "  
H: 18/321540/4294610 "  
I: 18/321820/4293730 "  
J: 18/321590/4292650 "  
K: 18/322020/4291800 "  
L: 18/321880/4291220 "  
M: 18/322030/4289870 (Mount Vernon quad.)  
N: 18/321940/4289030 "  
O: 18/322550/4288560 "  
P: 18/322410/4287140 "  
Q: 18/321520/4286340 "  
R: 18/319790/4286370 "  
S: 18/319080/4287170 "  
T: 18/318600/4286440 "  
U: 18/318430/4286550 "  
V: 18/318380/4287040 "  
W: 18/319120/4287580 "  
X: 18/320000/4286530 "  
Y: 18/321290/4286520 "  
Z: 18/322200/4287280 "  
AA: 18/322320/4288480 "  
BB: 18/321750/4288970 "  
CC: 18/321920/4289900 "  
DD: 18/321770/4291070 (Alexandria quad.)  
EE: 18/321910/4291720 "  
FF: 18/321460/4292660 "  
GG: 18/321700/4293770 "  
HH: 18/321380/4294590 "  
II: 18/321940/4295640 "  
JJ: 18/322420/4298060 "  
KK: 18/322530/4299620 "  
LL: 18/322040/4301260 "  
MM: 18/322300/4302830 "  
NN: 18/322830/4304150 "  
OO: 18/321380/4305590 (Washington West quad.)