

Building on the Legacy of the Past: An Exploration into Monroe Park's Past, Present, and Future

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ABSTRACT

Increasingly, we are faced with the finite nature of space in the urban context. We struggle with a desire to preserve ties to the past and our need to create spaces that are relevant to current circumstances and contemporary social and cultural ideas. This thesis explores the possibilities of an approach to design which embraces both change and continuity, adding a new chapter to the legacy of a given place. An understanding of history as a process of development running continuously from past to present, rather than as a series of specific moments in time, provides a broader view of the ways in which the past is connected to the present. The inclusion of change as part of the past opens the way for new changes which continue the process of development. An exploration of Richmond, Virginia's Monroe Park, leading to a proposed redesign of the park, provides a case study for this approach. A combination of historical research, analysis of current circumstances, and design investigations culminates in a proposed design for Monroe Park which provides continuity with the past, embraces the present, and presents possibilities for the future.

To Megan

Without your love, unflinching support, and confidence
none of this would have been possible.

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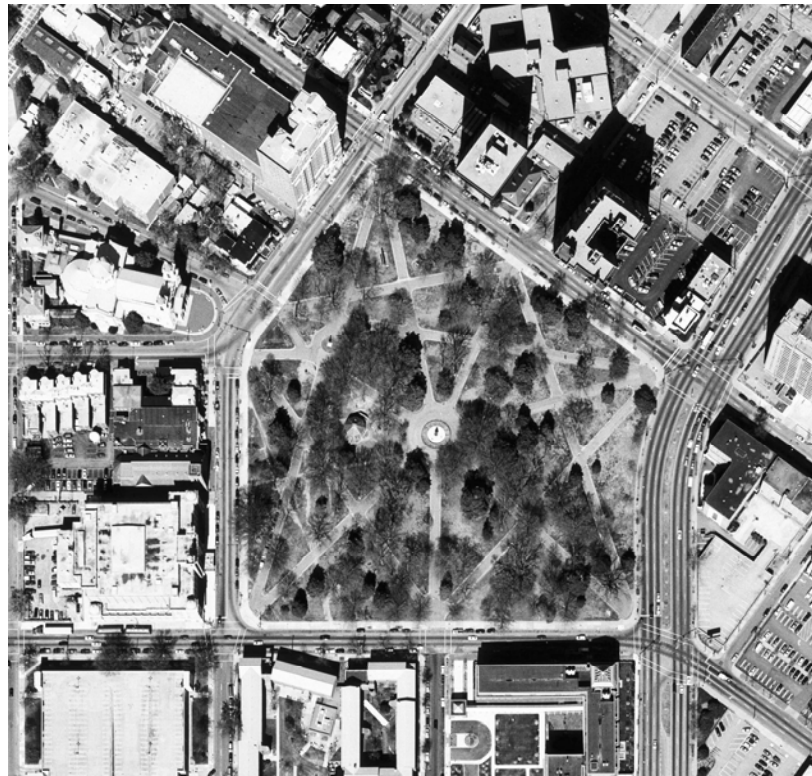
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INTRODUCTION

Every thing, every event, every person is "historic." To attempt to preserve all of the past would be life-denying.
Kevin Lynch, *What Time is This Place?* (36)

Increasingly, we are faced with the finite nature of space in the urban context. We struggle with our desire to preserve our ties with the past and our need to create spaces that are relevant to current circumstances and contemporary social and cultural ideas. The focus of preservation on safeguarding the physical forms of the past throw these two concerns into direct competition for control of the future of urban spaces. Proposals for new design carry with them the destruction of old forms. Proposals for preservation represent lost opportunities to participate in the shaping of our world. Certainly, there are sites where the preservation of physical form from past eras does not compromise the relevance of that place in the present or its active role in the life of the city. However, in many cases, freezing a place at a static moment in time threatens to diminish its relevance and vitality in the present. This situation does not mean that there is no value in the history of the site, or that our desire to maintain a connection to our past should be abandoned. Rather, it suggests the need for an approach to maintaining continuity with the past less connected to the preservation of physical form.

This thesis investigates how explorations into a given site's history can generate inspiration for design which not only provides continuity with the past, but fully embraces the present, and presents possibilities for the future. An understanding of history focused on the dynamic relationship between past, present, and future, and its implications for design, provide the foundation for this investigation. A redesign of Richmond, Virginia's Monroe Park presents an illustration of these concepts in practice. An understanding of the park's past creates a



Monroe Park (City of Richmond GIS)

framework for identifying and addressing its present circumstances. The proposed design for Monroe Park seeks to bring forward the relationships that contributed to its past success, rather than the specifics of its past form, creating a new form that expresses continuity with the past through a restored relevance in the urban fabric of Richmond.

Part one of this thesis presents concepts from the fields of history, philosophy, and urban design which provide the foundation for the approach employed in the following study of Monroe Park. Part two delineates the process of synthesizing historical research, evaluation of present circumstances, and design explorations to reveal a new understanding of Monroe Park. Part three presents a new design for Monroe Park aimed at communicating this understanding of the Park and its place in the city. Taken as a whole, this thesis highlights the site specific, and time specific, nature of this approach. The particulars of

what was brought forward in the design for Monroe Park provide one example of how explorations into a site's past can aid in our understanding of its present. As a model, this approach promises applicability to a wide range of sites, with outcomes ranging from preservation to a complete break with the past, depending on the specifics of the site and time. Regardless of the particulars of the proposed design, an enhanced understanding of the past, and the process of change and continuity which tie it to the present, create an aspect of depth that helps add meaning to place.

PART ONE: FOUNDATION THOUGHTS ON HISTORY & DESIGN



To properly reclaim and improve these sites, the first and, perhaps, only thing we need to learn is how to look at them from a different point of view.

-Sebastien Marot, "The Reclaiming of Sites." (56)

CHAPTER 1: LANDSCAPE AS LIVING ORGANISM

Thus, in reading the site as a living and dynamic organism, the landscape architect is able to revitalize and incorporate once abandoned sites into present and larger fields of effect.

-Sebastien Marot
"The Reclaiming of Sites" (50-51)

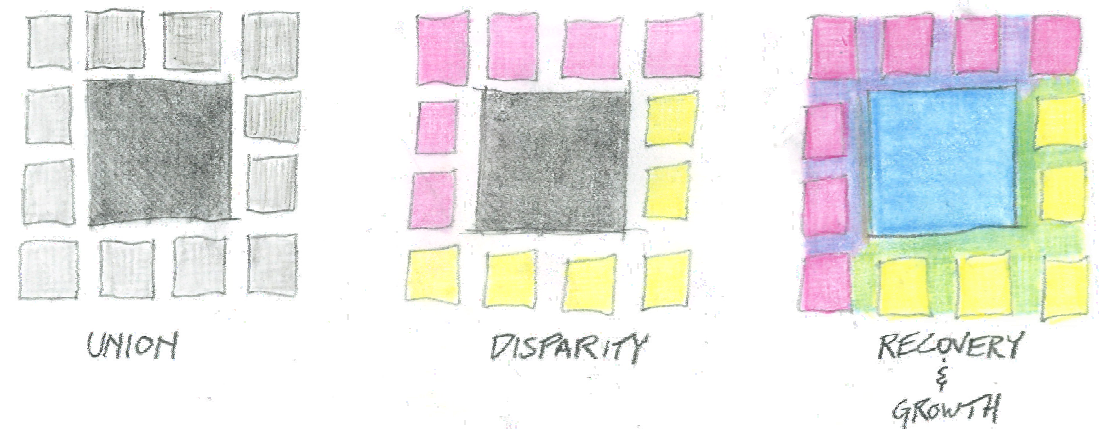
Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it — either through effort or by some happy chance. And, in a growing life, the recovery is never mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed. If the gap between organism and environment is too wide, the creature dies. If its activity is not enhanced by the temporary alienation, it merely subsists. Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives.

-John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (14)

Dewey's description of life's cycles of alienation and recovery provides a useful way of looking at urban public spaces faced with declining fortunes. The prosperity of a public space depends largely on the relationships it has with the surrounding area. Good relationships, both in terms of form and function, provide the basis for a strong role in the everyday life of the city, or at least that part immediately surrounding the public space. When the surrounding area changes, the nature of the public space's relationships with that area change as well. If the public space does not adapt in order to maintain strong relationships, the role of that place in the everyday life of the city begins to diminish. Little by little the active role of the public space erodes, and along the way the meaning and understanding of that place in the public's perception begins to decline. In many cases, this process of alienation and decline occurs slowly, making the individual changes almost imperceptible. Friends of a given place may praise that place for its ability to endure in a changing world without seeing the many small ways in which these changes are draining its vitality. Unless by "some happy chance" new relationships are established, the cumulative effects of this process eventually drag a place into a state of decline that prompts efforts to remedy the situation.

The question of how best to turn around the declining fortunes of a given place is commonly met by two opposing responses. On one side, groups point to past glory, calling for restoration efforts to return the place to its golden era. On the

other, groups point to the current state of decline as an opportunity to wipe the slate clean and start over, promoting new visions and designs for the space. While both of these approaches promise improvement over current conditions, each fails to address the full range of ways in which public space can be "enriched by the state of disparity and resistance." Restoring a place to a previous form looks only to past successes, ignoring the changes which brought about the current state of decline. This focus may succeed in resurrecting past forms, but does little to address their relevance in the present. "The scenic image stands only as a historical sign, a mere picture," Steen Hoyer explains, "while the experience of land moves from engagement and change to mere voyeurism" (71). Starting over from a clean slate looks only at the present, disregarding potential sources of continuity. While this approach may prove more successful at addressing current needs, it does so at the expense of the depth of meaning provided by the past. Severed connections to the past rob a site of a dimension that defines what makes "a given area special and unique" (Marot, 48). Providing direction which will promote growth in the life of a place, and foster "a more extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives," requires an approach which neither dismisses nor dwells upon the past. Present circumstances suggest changes which build on what came before, weaving aspects of past and present together so that "the change not only comes but it belongs; it has a definite place in the larger whole" (Dewey, 154). Accomplishing this task requires an understanding of the variety of ways in which a place's present connects with its past.

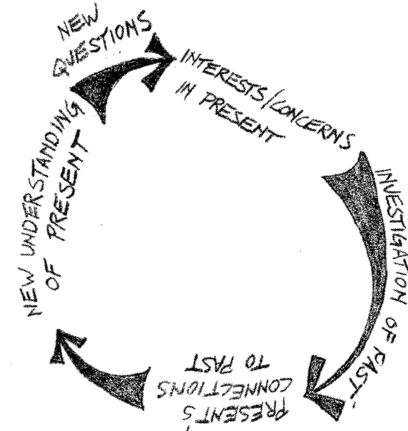


CHAPTER 2: THE HISTORIAN'S VIEW OF HISTORY

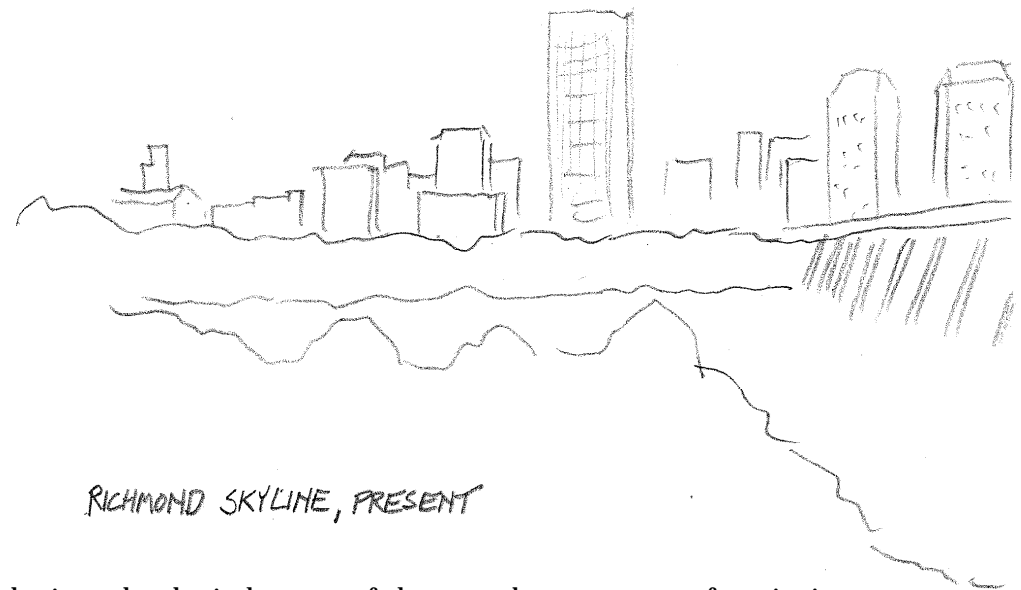
Each age writes this history of the past anew with reference to the conditions uppermost in its own time. ... The aim of history, then, is to know the elements of the present by understanding what came into the present from the past. For the present is simply the developing past, the past the undeveloped present. ... The antiquarian strives to bring back the past for the sake of the past; the historian strives to show the present to itself by revealing its origin from the past. The goal of the antiquarian is the dead past; the goal of the historian is the living present.

Frederick Jackson Turner, 1891
(Limerick, 17)

The historian's focus on connections between past and present, as described by Turner, provides one model for gaining a more thorough understanding of the possibilities for recovering a given place. The historian does not view the past as a series of isolated events disconnected from the present. Instead, these events reveal themselves as part of a continuous process of development running from past to present. "Every past was once the imminent future of its past and is now the past," Dewey explains, "not absolutely, but of the change which constitutes the present" (324). History, viewed as a process, contains both elements of change, distinguishing different periods, and continuity, carrying forward the legacy of the past into the present. From this standpoint, the idea of a past in danger of being lost is, to borrow a phrase from historian Patricia Limerick, "an un-subtle concept in a subtle world" (25). The static thing recognized as the past is already lost. However, aspects of that past continue to have relevance, or at least the potential to have relevance, in the present. . "To see, to perceive," as Dewey contends, "is more than to recognize. It does not identify something present in terms of a past disconnected from it. The past is carried into the present so as to expand and deepen the content of the latter" (24). The historian's understanding of history as a continuous process raises questions aimed at showing "the present to itself by revealing its origin from the past." How and why did places take on a particular form? How were these places understood at the time? What has changed and what has been carried forward over time? The answers to these questions provide new understandings of the past, uncover sources of continuity and promote new insights into present conditions. These in turn prompt new questions about the past and its relationship to the present. Through this cyclical process the designer gains a more thorough understanding of both past and present, providing a foundation from which to determine the best means of "extending the legacy of a place toward a productive future" (Griot, 65).



RICHMOND SKYLINE, 1810



RICHMOND SKYLINE, PRESENT

Emphasis on the physical aspects of place can obscure sources of continuity.

CHAPTER 3: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

The 'classic' when it was produced bore the marks of adventure.

-John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (144)

There are two sorts of possible worlds in which esthetic experience would not occur. In a world of mere flux, change would not be cumulative; it would not move toward a close. ... Equally is it true, however, that a world that is finished, ended, would have no traits of suspense and crisis, and would offer no opportunity for resolution. ... Because the actual world, that in which we live, is a combination of movement and culmination, of breaks and re-unions, the experience of a living creature is capable of esthetic quality.

-John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (16-17)

The historian's approach points out the need to recognize both change and continuity in order to fully understand a place in the present. Viewed in terms of a process of development, change becomes not so much a threat to continuity, but rather a necessary counterpoint, a defining aspect of continuity. "Continuity," as Dewey defines it, "involves forces and structures that endure through change" (323). The ability of these forces and structures to endure depends on their ability to find relevance in new situations. Continuity does not necessarily entail the continuation of exact forms and relationships, but rather the recreation of these aspects adapted to new circumstances.

Resistance to change is natural. Faced with the uncertainty of change, we find comfort in the familiar. However, change is inevitable and, in the end, desirable. Attempts to maintain a place as it was in the past run counter to this ongoing process of change. Clinging to the familiar, without acknowledging the effects of change, ultimately can threaten the continued relevance of the very things we are trying to preserve. The familiar physical forms of a place remain in existence, while change erodes at their meaning and our experience of place. "A significant problem arises," Hoyer argues, "when contemporary, everyday modes of experiencing the land are reduced solely to the visual" (70). Accepting the reality of change, and seeking out sources of continuity in relation to these changes, provides an opportunity to preserve meaning and experience. While any alteration to the familiar may be met with irritation, this irritation will subside if the change reveals itself as a logical step in the process of development by building on past accomplishments. As Dewey contends, "the imaginative endures because, while at first strange with respect to us, it is enduringly familiar with respect to the nature of things" (269).



Many kinds of change can effect the way we understand and experience public spaces.

CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPATION IN THE PROCESS

Landscape is not given but made and remade; it is an inheritance that demands to be recovered, cultivated, and projected toward new ends.

-James Corner,
"Recovering Landscape as a Critical Cultural Practice."
(12)

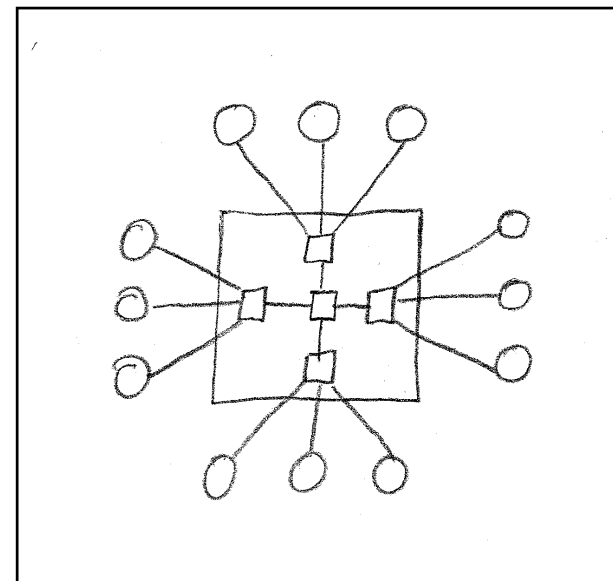
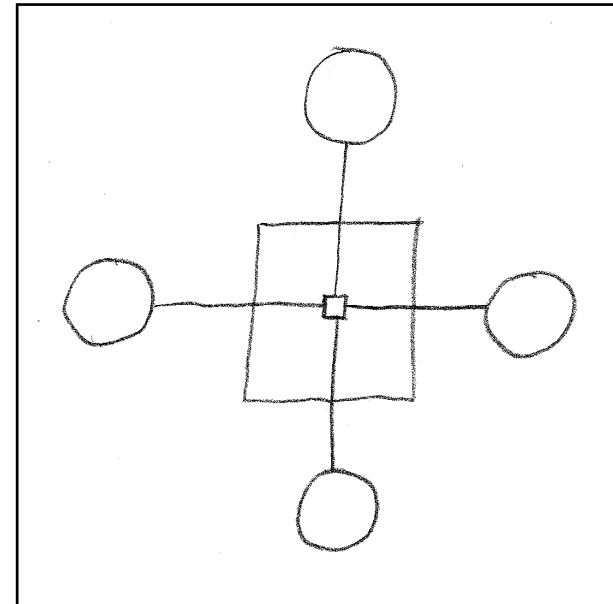
The junction of the new and old is not mere composition of forces, but is a re-creation in which the present impulsion gets form and solidity while the old, the 'stored,' material is literally revived, given new life and soul through having to meet a new situation.

-John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (60)

An emphasis on history as an ongoing process provides one solution to what Corner has denounced as "a depressing cultural atrophy whereby all hope for the future is replaced by too high a regard for past accomplishments" (9). Viewed as part of this process, our admiration demands efforts to carry aspects of these past accomplishments forward in ways that preserve their relevance in the present. Rather than protecting them from the onslaught of change, the designer is empowered to find new ways of carrying forward the legacy of these places in ways that address, and even embrace, change. By acknowledging change, and seeking to reveal new sources of continuity, regard for past accomplishments can be translated into hope for the future. "The change that accompanies time is not always positive," Marc Trieb points out, "but the linear progression of time tends to be realistic rather than pessimistic" (37-38). By actively participating in the ongoing process of development, the designer has the opportunity to promote new understandings of these past accomplishments focused on the "living present" rather than the "dead past" (Limerick, 17).

Concern for the past does not need to translate into a lack of interest in innovation. Dewey suggests that, quite to the contrary, innovation is well served by knowledge and absorption of the past when altered by a new vision (159). Exploration into a particular site's past helps reveal points of departure for new directions, as well as points of continuity which define the way these new directions belong. Corner reminds us that "over time, landscapes accrue layers with every new representation, and these inevitably thicken and enrich the range of interpretations and possibilities" (5). The designer's interpretation of past and present, becomes a process of determining what should be carried forward and what should be changed to fully realize the potential of a site. Through this process,

the designer is able to extend the legacy of a place in ways that have the potential to release "powers previously cramped or inert" (Dewey, 303-04). Alteration of the familiar in ways that restore the full range of experience of a place create the possibility of "that sudden magic which gives us the sense of inner revelation brought to us about something we had supposed to be known through and through" (Dewey, 170-71).



A full understanding of how the forces of change and continuity have shaped a place over time presents the opportunity for design responses that bring together innovation and continuity.

CHAPTER 5: CARRYING THE PAST FORWARD

... elements that issue from prior experience are stirred into action in fresh desires, impulses, and images. These proceed from the subconscious, not cold in shapes that are identified with particulars of the past, not in chunks or lumps, but fused in the fire of internal commotion.

-John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (65)

Man finds himself more at home, since he is in a world that he has participated in making.

-John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (159)

The nature of what is carried forward from the past, and how it is carried forward, depends largely on the specifics of the site, and the discoveries made during exploration of that site. Aspects of the past can be physical or intangible. The act of carrying forward aspects of the past can involve processes of addition, subtraction, or reorganization, or any combination of the three. Two overlapping goals help guide these decisions. Elements of the past are carried forward, and presented in a way that helps promote a better understanding of the processes that have shaped a place over time. Lessons from the past are carried forward, and translated into means of restoring a place's role in the life of the city. In both cases, the concerns and circumstances of the present mix with the legacy of the past in the creation of new forms and relationships.

Carrying forward physical evidence of the past provides a tangible connection to the past. It taps into our desire for the familiar, offering recognizable reminders of past forms. However, integrating these physical remnants of the past into new designs for a place challenges our understanding of these parts and the place as a whole. "They celebrate the familiar instead of reproducing its forms in waxy puppets." Dewey comments, "the old takes on a new guise in which the sense of the familiar is rescued from the oblivion that custom usually effects" (140). Remnants of the past can be left intact and partially built over, allowing the layers of a place to reveal themselves in little discoveries. Remnants can be more fully integrated into new designs as they are, employing aspects of collage to raise questions about the relationship of past and present. Physical evidence of the past need not be carried forward in its entirety. Rather, materials connected to past forms can be employed in the creation of new forms, and old forms can be recreated with new materials and with new purpose. Regardless of the means, the integration of past and present gives physical presence to the forces of change and continuity, promoting new understandings of the processes that have shaped a place over time.

The integration of physical evidence of the past into new designs plays an important role in attempts to extend the legacy of a place. However, the legacy of a place contains "successive layers, both visible and invisible." Christophe Girot argues, "sometimes the most important aspect of a given site is almost intangible. It is not necessarily what remains visible to the eye that matters most, but those forces and events that undergird the evolution of a place" (63). Change over time, in the widest variety of ways and arenas, effects the understanding, meaning, and experience of a place. Changing relationships to a place can obscure these intangible aspects, so critical to the success of a place, over time. Carrying forward the intangible requires an understanding of the past and the change that represents the present. The understanding, meaning, and experience of a place cannot be carried forward as they were, but rather must be translated to account for new situations. Understanding of the past provides clues, models of how physical form participated in shaping these intangible aspects. Such models are useful so long as the emphasis is placed on "salvaging the meaning while manipulating the form according to the exigencies of circumstance" (Koetter, 77). Ultimately, understanding, meaning, and experience of a place are beyond the direct control of the designer. However, the designer can reveal previously obscured relationships and connections, both temporal and physical, through design, which promote a restored role in the life of the city. As Marot claims, "the work resembles stage design in that the landscape architect stages the conditions necessary for ensuring the participation and engagement of people in the new public spaces" (49).



Carrying forward physical evidence of the past can take many forms. Above left, the strip of granite curb outside this pedestrian walkway provides a reminder of the road which once existed. Above Right, granite from the Richmond canal locks reused as seating in a plaza only a short distance from the old canal. Right, monuments provide one of the most obvious examples of physical evidence of the past.



CHAPTER 6: URBAN FABRIC

Its values, its qualities as seen, are modified by the other parts of the whole scene, and in turn these modify the value, as perceived, of every other part of the whole.

-John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (136)

Memory is the result of a process of selection and of organizing what is selected so that it is within reach in expectable situations. There must also be some random accumulations to enable us to discover unexpected relationships. But serendipity is possible only when recollection is essentially a holding fast to what is meaningful and a release of what is not.

-Kevin Lynch, *What Time is This Place?* (36)

For, if without prophecy there is no hope, then, without memory there can be no communication."

-Colin Rowe & Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (49)

The combination of aspects from past and present described in the previous chapters is not intended as a replacement for preservation or designs representing a clear departure from the past. All three have their place in defining our cities, and all three play a role in showing how the forces of change and continuity shape the urban fabric. In the case of preservation, continuity becomes the defining aspect of a place, while change remains external to that place. When change reflects a complete departure from a place's past, the opposite is true. The process described in previous chapters differs in that it includes both change and continuity as possessions of the site.

Understanding of history as a process, and explorations into the past, can play a valuable role in choosing a design response. If a site's historic value outweighs the need to address current circumstances, or if the form of the site still has relevance in the present, then preservation might be the best response. If connections with the past have deteriorated to a point where nothing can be drawn from that past, a fresh start may be in order. Between these two extremes exists a wide range of responses involving different balances of old and new. Public space's continuity of general purpose combined with the need for public space to play an active role in the everyday life of the modern city point to this third response.

Looking beyond the public space to its place in the urban fabric, provides another argument for this response. Public space, through the creation of strong relationships to its surroundings, has the potential to tie together, and shape the identity, of whole areas. It provides a point of connection for the area surrounding it. By

combining aspects of past and present, public space becomes a middle ground, capable of relating to elements more directly tied to either extreme. These relationships aid in interpretations of remnants of the past and the changes reflected in newer elements in ways that the sharp contrast between the two cannot. In areas dominated by change, public space can provide continuity and depth. For areas in need of change, it can provide a glimpse of how the past remains relevant in the present. The integration of past and present, change and continuity, in the design of public space points out the larger possibilities for moving forward without dismissing the past. In the words of John Dewey:

A sense of possibilities that are unrealized and that might be realized are when they are put in contrast with actual conditions, the most penetrating 'criticism' of the latter that can be made. It is by a sense of possibilities opening before us that we become aware of constrictions that hem us in and of burdens that oppress (346).



Preservation, new design, and the variety of responses in between provide a contrast of new and old that adds interest to the urban landscape.

Public Space has the potential to act as a catalyst for revitalizing urban areas. Richmond's Riverwalk has had this effect on the properties in the vicinity.



CHAPTER 7: APPLICATION

One must move about, within and without, and through repeated visits let the structure gradually yield itself to him in various lights and in connection with changing moods.

-John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (220)

Inherent to the cultivation of hopes and dreams is an optimism, an openness, and a playful sense of possibilities.

-Steen Hoyer,
"Things Take Time and Time Takes Things:
The Danish Landscape." (76)

Richmond Virginia's Monroe Park provides an excellent opportunity to put the concepts delineated in the previous chapters to the test. The decline of Monroe Park's condition calls out for efforts to revitalize the park. An understanding of the park in the present and the past, and the forces of change and continuity that connect the two, creates the basis for determining a direction for these efforts. The translation of the ideas presented in the previous chapters into a process of exploration, and ultimately into a design response, drew heavily on the process described in Christophe Girot's "Four Trace Concepts in Landscape Architecture."

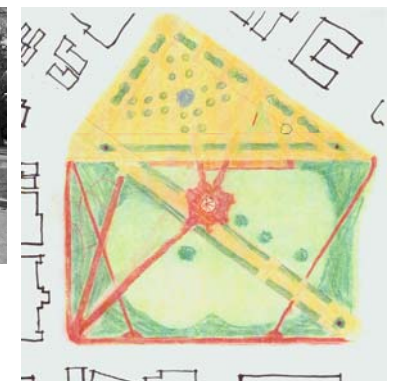
The four trace concepts — landing, grounding, finding, and founding — which constitute Girot's approach "each focus on particular gradients of discovery, inquiry, and resolution" (60). Landing coincides with the designer's first visit to a site. Landing, as Girot describes it, "requires a particular state of mind, one where intuitions and impressions prevail, where one feels before one thinks, where one moves across and stalks before seeking full disclosure and understanding" (61). Landing "is in fact, a living manifestation of the experiential potential of the site and thus has potent spatial and psychological effects on the subsequent thinking through of the design project" (62). Grounding changes the focus of exploration toward research and analysis. "It is a probe into the successive histories of a place" (62). This stage of exploration helps reveal layers obscured in the current landscape and attaches meaning to the fragments of the past still in existence. Finding is about the discovery of aspects that make a place special. "What is found is the *je ne sais quoi* ingredient that conveys a distinct quality to a place" (63). Finding is as much about the process of discovery as it is about the things discovered. It entails repeated visits to a place, and can be very directed or more haphazard. In a sense it is a continuation of landing, a search for a more complete understanding of those initial impressions of a place. Founding "comes at the moment when the prior

three acts are synthesized into a new and transformed construction of the site" (64). Founding is the design response that grows out of the process of exploration. Girot's approach compliments the ideas presented in the previous chapter's, providing a means of exploring the past that is firmly connected to the present and focused on discoveries that provide direction for design.

While the exploration of Monroe Park, described in part two, did not follow Girot's approach exactly, it did employ his blend of direct physical experience, intuition, and research. Prior knowledge of the park, through personal experience and research into the park's history, altered the nature of the first stage of landing. Awareness of the park's current problems and previous periods of success had to be put aside to allow impressions of the site itself to take precedence in the initial visit to Monroe Park for this study. A mixture of previous perceptions of the park and initial impressions made during this initial visit provided direction for the continuing research that corresponded with Girot's stage of grounding. Research into the park's past produced a basis for comparing the park, its surroundings, and the relationships between the two over time. Repeated visits to the park and the surrounding area added another dimension to the process of grounding. The process of finding was carried out by continually testing the discoveries made during the grounding process through application to design ideas for Monroe Park. The translation of research findings into design thoughts, and visualization on site of how these design ideas would effect the park, brought new insights to the research process. The continual back and forth between research, direct observation, and design uncovered new layers of understanding, challenged some ideas, and reinforced others. This process focused on the physical character of the park and its surroundings, particularly those aspects within the control of the designer. However, the role of these physical aspects in promoting understanding and use, and comparisons with how form effected understanding and use in previous eras, remained an important aspect of the study. Ultimately, the goal of this exploration was to provide a direction for design that would promote the revitalization of Monroe Park, giving it a presence in the urban landscape that provided continuity in its role as an active public space.



Exploration of Monroe Park combined research, direct observation, and design inquiry.



PART TWO: PROCESS EXPLORATION OF MONROE PARK



One cannot participate in a conversation without first listening to what has been said before, listening to what others have to say, and speaking only to keep the discourse going.

-Michel Corajoud (Marot, 50)

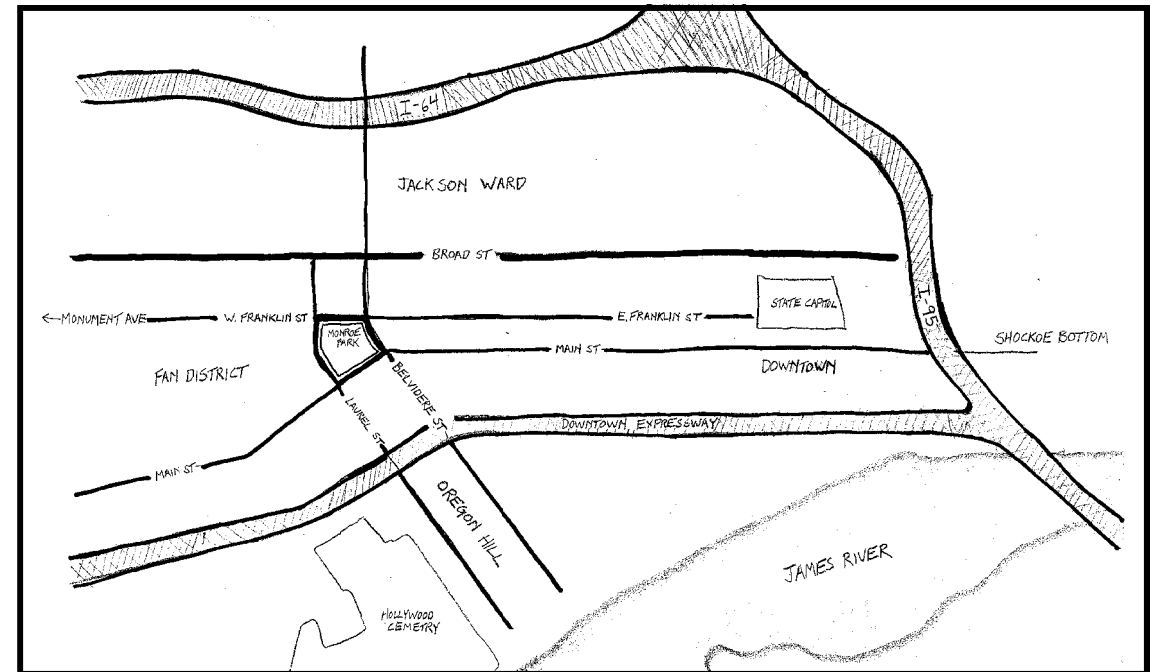
CHAPTER 8: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In 1851, the City of Richmond established Monroe Park, originally Western Square, along with three other city parks. Officially the city council promoted the park's role in providing "opportunities to partake of 'invigorating air' and to participate in the 'interchange of social affections'" (Clinger, 3). Unofficially, the city hoped that the park would serve as a catalyst for development. In 1851, Dr. John P. Little argued in the *Southern Literary Messenger* that "if the ground was now secured and planted with trees, it would soon be surrounded with handsome blocks of houses and the adjoining lots be very much increased in value" (Clinger, 3). At the time of its establishment, Monroe Park sat just outside of the western city limits. The acquisition of this land, and its establishment as a park, presented the first step in promoting the development necessary to make annexation by the city a possibility.

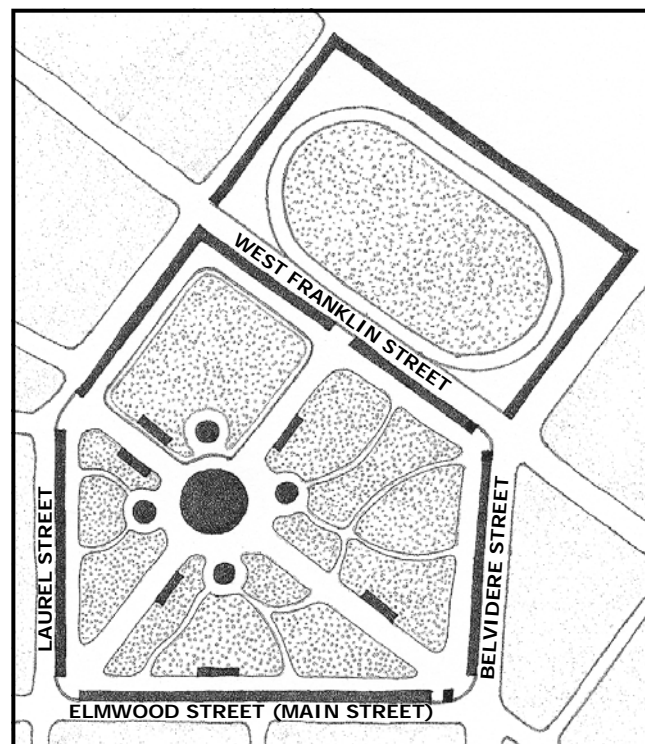
In the unsettled political climate of the 1850's, visions for the park and the surrounding area were put on hold. Instead of taking on the role of residential park, Monroe Park served as the host of the Virginia State Agricultural Society's annual fair throughout the 1850's. In addition the park was used as a parade and drill ground, and for fourth of July celebrations. At the start of the Civil War, the park became a camp of instruction for Confederate Troops. During the war, it served as a military hospital.

In 1867, the City of Richmond finally annexed the area surrounding Monroe Park. The park bore little resemblance to the green square extolled by city council at the time of its establishment. In fact, the city saw fit to rent the park for the grazing of cattle and the occasional baseball game. By 1869, residents around the park, led by Lieutenant Colonel Albert Ordway, began calling on city council for funds to improve Monroe Park. Ordway, who had recently been appointed to the city council, argued before the council that "These grounds were originally purchased by the city with the object of creating a public square. Considerable property has been purchased in the neighborhood and held at values based on that expectation. The present use and condition of the grounds seriously detracts from the progress and improvement of the city" (Clinger, 11). Over the next three years, improvements to the park included tree plantings, grading, construction of paths, and the installation of a stone fountain, donated by Ordway himself.

During the period from 1870 through the 1890's, Monroe Park witnessed a dramatic increase in development in the areas surrounding the park. Numerous residences began springing up, ranging from the modest dwellings in Oregon Hill to the south and the Fan district to the west to the impressive homes along West Franklin Street to the north. Two churches were completed, Pace Memorial on W.

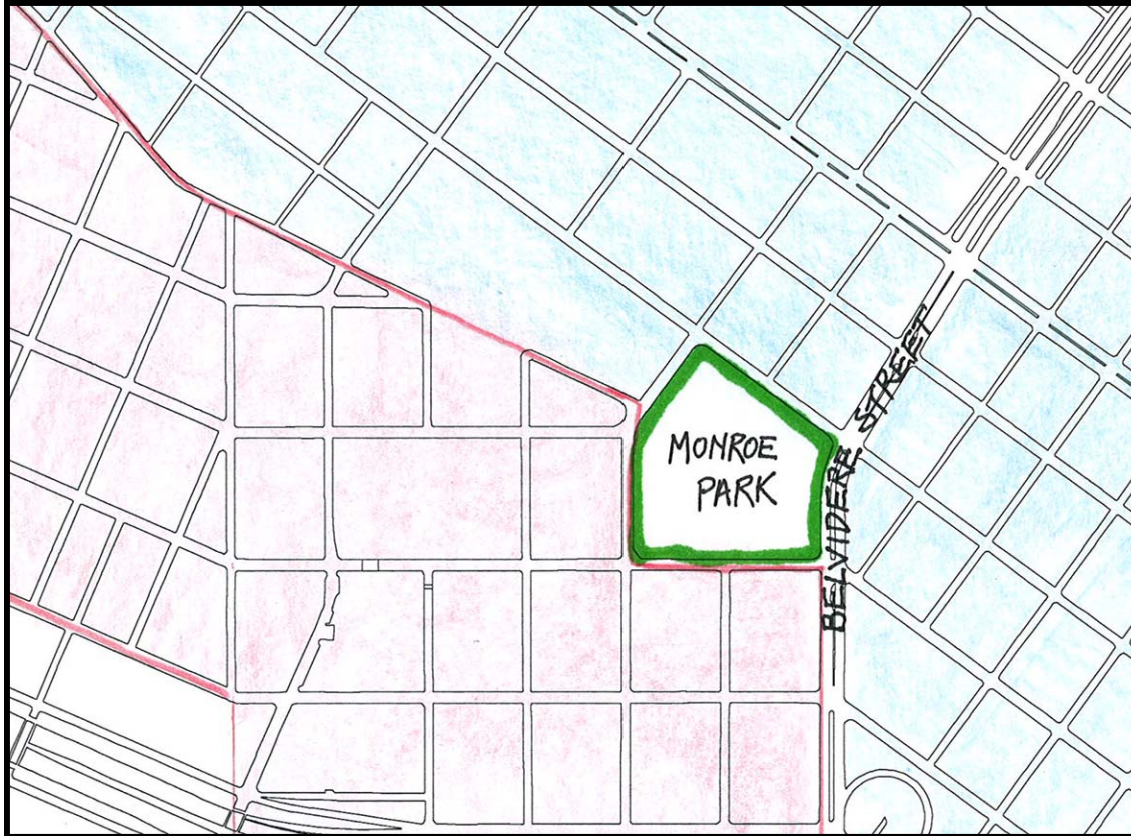


Monroe Park in relation to present day Richmond.



Above, Williams House, 1891.
Left, Plan for Fairgrounds, 1854.
(redrawn from original plan, Virginia Historical Society.)

Franklin and Holy Trinity on Laurel Street, and a third, Sacred Heart Cathedral, started construction during this period. Development in this area marked a new phase in the growth of Richmond, and a new era in the city's recovery from the Civil War. Several decades after its establishment, Monroe Park had fulfilled its role as a catalyst for development.



Monroe Park's location at the intersection of Richmond's street grid, shown in blue, and the street grids inherited from the town of Sydney, shown in red, gives the park its easily recognized shape.

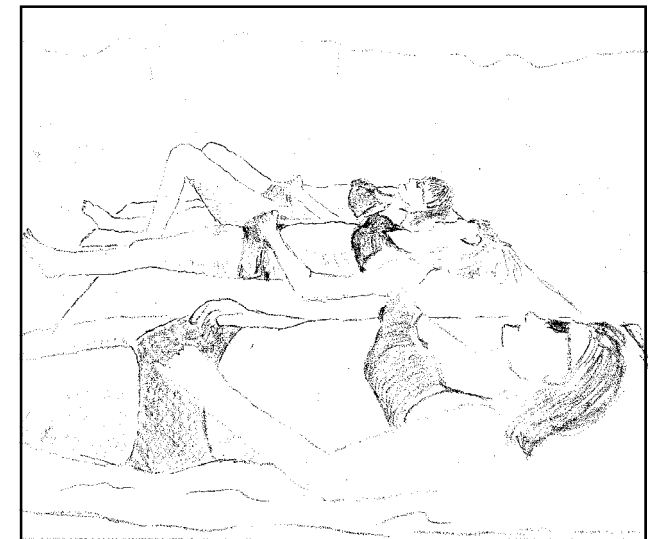
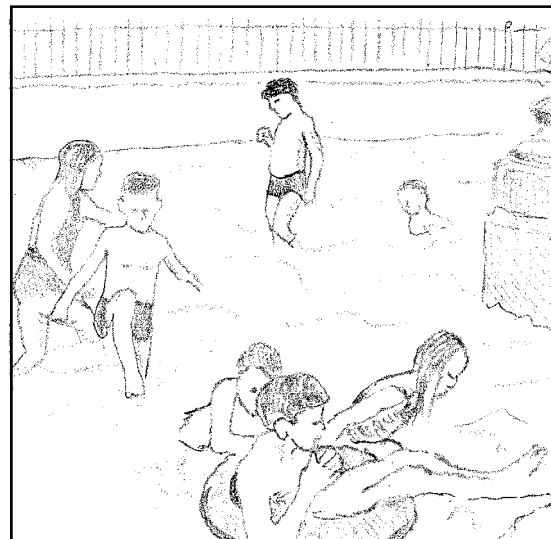
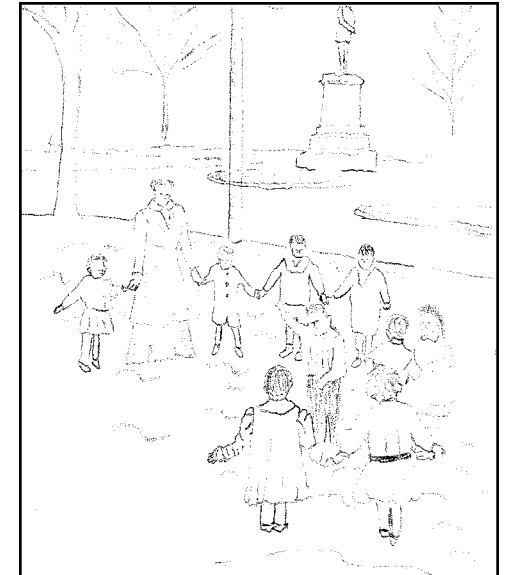
Growth in the area surrounding Monroe Park departed from the pattern of growth which had characterized Richmond's westward expansion out to Belvidere Street. Expansion to Belvidere Street extended the uniform street grid of Richmond. With the annexation of land west of Belvidere Street the city inherited the multiple street grids of the failed town of Sydney. Most of these streets, laid out on paper in 1817, had not been built, but the wording of the plat for Sydney forced future land owners to recognize the street plan. Monroe Park's pentagonal shape responds to the varying street grids that come together at the park. While the location of the park had more to do with the availability of land in 1851, its presence at the intersection of these varying grids helped emphasize the park as a point of transition into the new western section of Richmond.

The period from the mid 1870's through the 1920's would have to be considered Monroe Park's golden era. The park's success during this period reveals itself in a variety of ways. Consideration of the park as a location for both the Robert E. Lee and Jefferson Davis monuments suggests a certain level of prestige. While these monuments eventually ended up on Monument Avenue, several monuments did find a home in Monroe Park during this era. The appearance of the park on post-cards from the era also seems to suggest a certain status and recognition of the park. Numerous improvements to the park, including the replacement of the stone fountain with the four tiered cast-iron fountain present in the park today, show an active interest in the welfare of the park. Most importantly, the park enjoyed an active role in the everyday life of the area. In the summer of 1877, *The Enquirer* reported that "Monroe Park is crowded with delighted promenaders these lovely evenings and lovelier nights" (Clinger, 14). In addition to the nightly visits of promenaders, the park hosted numerous concerts, voter registration campaigns, speakers, and holiday celebrations. During the day, nannies and their wards gathered in the park. "Children from all four sides spilled into the park to play during the day" (Clinger, 24). The location of a boy's school at one end of the park and a girl's school at the other made the park a popular place to mingle with the opposite sex. Overall, descriptions and pictures of the park during this period paint a picture of a lively, active public space thoroughly connected to its surroundings.

The period from the 1930's through the 1960's witnessed a change in the character of the area. The prestige of the neighborhood along W. Franklin Street began to wane. Two high rise apartment buildings, one at the corner of W. Franklin Street and Laurel Street and the other on W. Franklin Street, appeared at the edges of the park. The Mosque, now known as the Landmark Theater, was constructed to house an ACCA Temple, and was later acquired by the city for use as a theater. The Richmond Professional Institute, which would later become Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), moved to the area in 1928, taking up residence in several existing buildings. Despite these changes, the park continued to enjoy consistent use. Checker and chess boards were set out daily, attracting a regular crowd of players. A playground was added in the 1950's. While many of the special events which the park had hosted had moved on to new venues, the park continued to play an active role in the everyday life of the area.

In the latter part of this period, signs of the declining stature of the park began to appear. First in 1947, and later in 1959 and 1964, proposals for transforming parts of the park into parking were raised. In the mid 1960's, one proposal for the Downtown Expressway took the new highway right through Monroe Park. While enough support was garnered to defeat these proposals, the consideration of these ideas paints a much different picture of attitudes about the park from those seen during earlier periods.

The period from the mid 1970's to the present is marked by the declining fortunes of Monroe Park. Signs of neglect began taking their toll on the park. The VCU students who had made the park a popular spot for sunning, open air classes, and recreation began staying away from the park. In their place, the park became a haven for the homeless. By the mid 1980's the park was a place that newcomers were warned against. The exact reasons for this decline are not clear. The timing coincides with a period of "white flight" from the city that effected the character of neighborhoods and put a strain on city resources. However, by the mid 1980's many of these neighborhoods were rebounding. Regardless of the cause, by the late 1990's discussions of how to resurrect the park had begun. At the time of this study, however, little progress had been made.



Scenes from Monroe Park's past paint a very different image of the park in comparison to the park's current use as a place to park cars and a haven to Richmond's homeless population. Top left, Nannies meeting in the park in the early 1900's. Top right, school children playing in the park in the early 1900's. Middle left, children playing in the fountain in the 1950's. Middle right, VCU students sunbathing in the early 1970's. Bottom left, cars parked along the park's paths in 2003. Bottom right, one of the many homeless men and women who frequent the park, 2003. (Sketches based on photographs from Valentine Richmond History Center.)

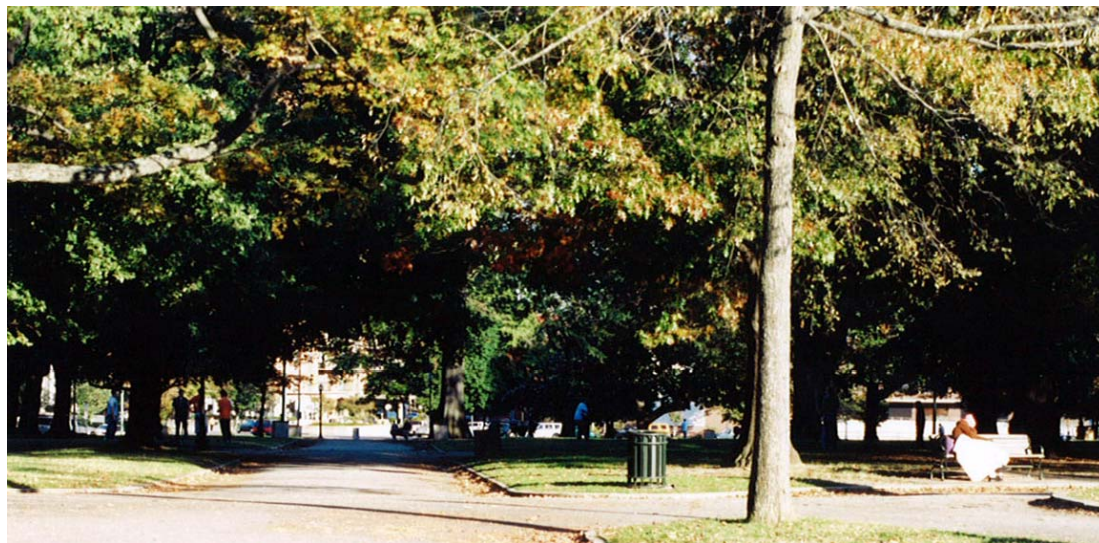


CHAPTER 9: INITIAL IMPRESSIONS, PROBLEMS

From a distance the green canopy of Monroe Park appears inviting. However, as one nears the park the crowded stands of trees and low hanging branches take on a dark and unwelcoming feel. The pervasive, low hanging canopy cuts off sightlines into, through, and out of the park raising concerns about safety and limiting interaction between the park and its surroundings. Rather than providing a source of orientation, the park actually obscures the connections among the areas surrounding it. The inability to see into or through the park provides little incentive to venture into Monroe Park.



The appealing sight of Monroe Park's trees begins to give way to a feeling of being overwhelmed by the overcrowded stands of trees and low hanging canopy as one moves closer to the park.



The dense tree cover and low hanging canopy make it impossible to see through the park, limiting visual contact between the park and its surroundings to a narrow area along the park's perimeter.

The material that constitutes a problem has to be converted into a means for its solution. It cannot be sidestepped.

-John Dewey, *Art as Experience*

A fountain, residing at the convergence of several paths at the center of the park, provides one of the few aspects that might entice someone to enter the park. However, upon reaching the fountain, one finds little reason to linger, as the paths simply encircle the fountain and continue on. As is the case with the fountain, the elements which make up Monroe Park — trees, lawn, paths, benches, lights, and several monuments — do little to reinforce each other. Rather, there appears to be no real recognizable pattern to the relationship between these elements. The consistent repetition of paths encircling areas of lawn and trees throughout the park creates a sense of overall homogeneity, making it difficult to discern one area from the next. Rather than providing breaks in this uniform fabric, the few points of interest, such as the fountain and monuments, seem to be swallowed up by the overwhelming sameness of their surroundings. The lack of variety, and moments of discovery, presents little reason to stay and explore.



Sightlines to the central fountain, shown above and below, provide one of the few incentives to venture deeper into the park. However, little has been done to create an area around the fountain, shown at right. In the end, little is gained by venturing to this space except a closer look at the fountain itself.



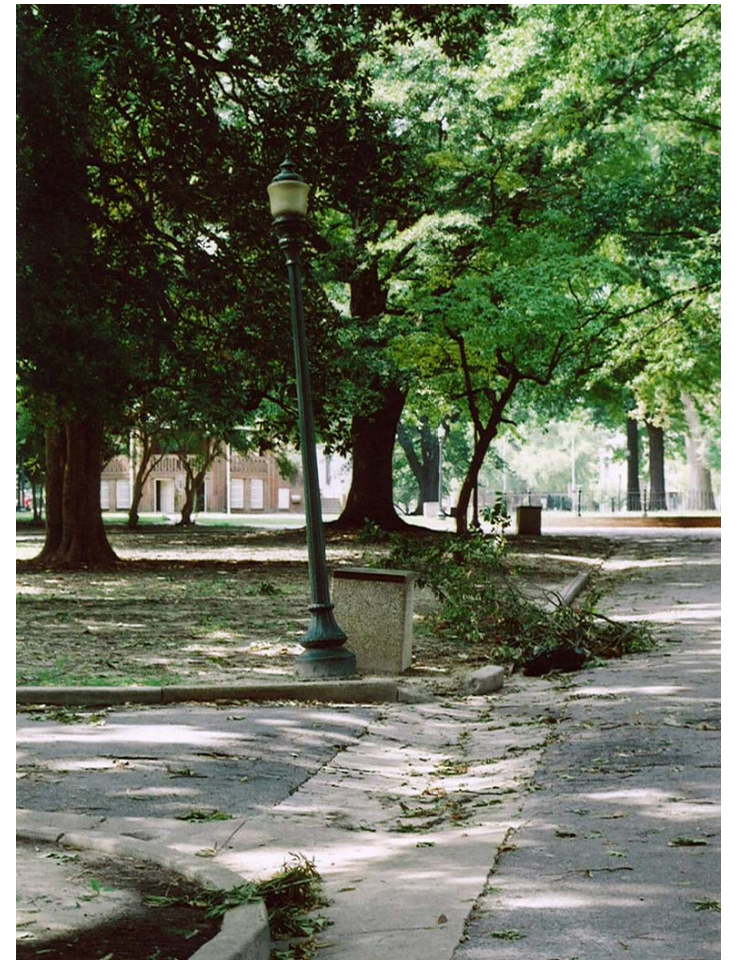
The trees closing in on one side of the Joseph Bryan monument combined with the open lawn on the other side do little to compliment the monument.



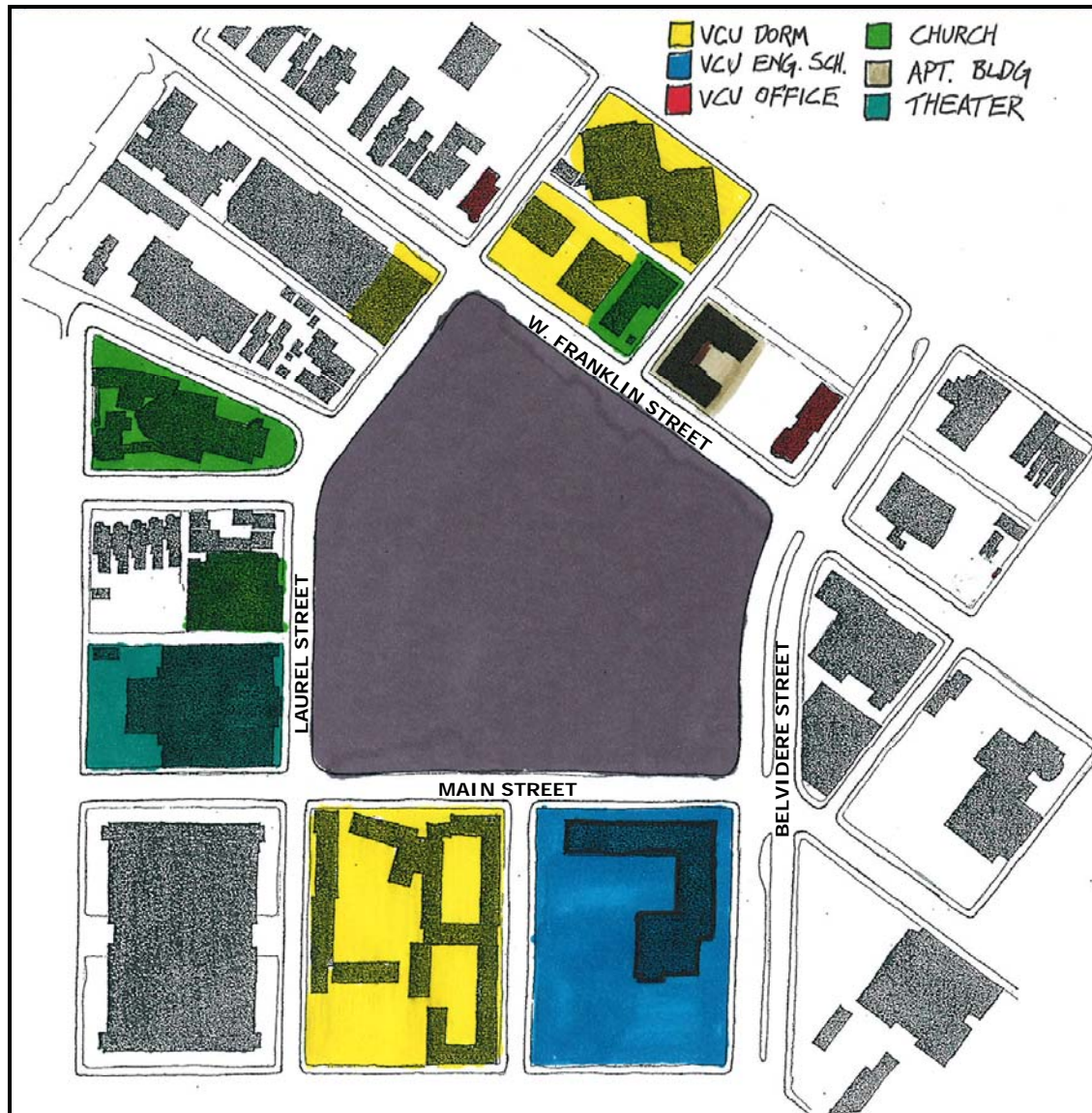
The repetitive pattern of paths combined with the lack of sightlines makes orientation within the park a difficult task.



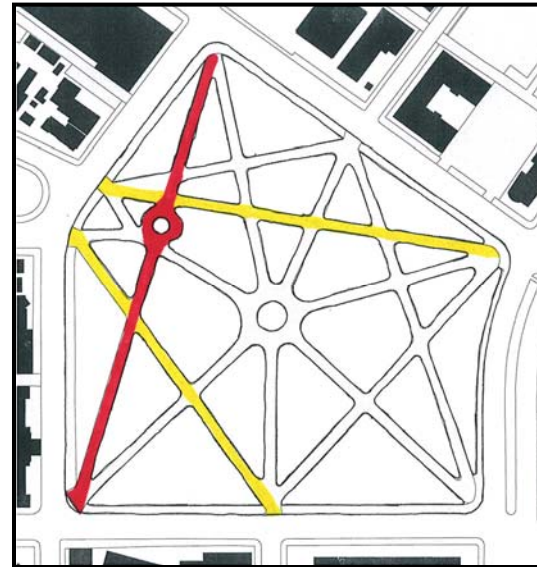
Obvious signs of neglect and haphazard maintenance, the use of the park's paths for parking, and the homeless who congregate in the park all suggest a place that has to some degree been abandoned as an active public space.



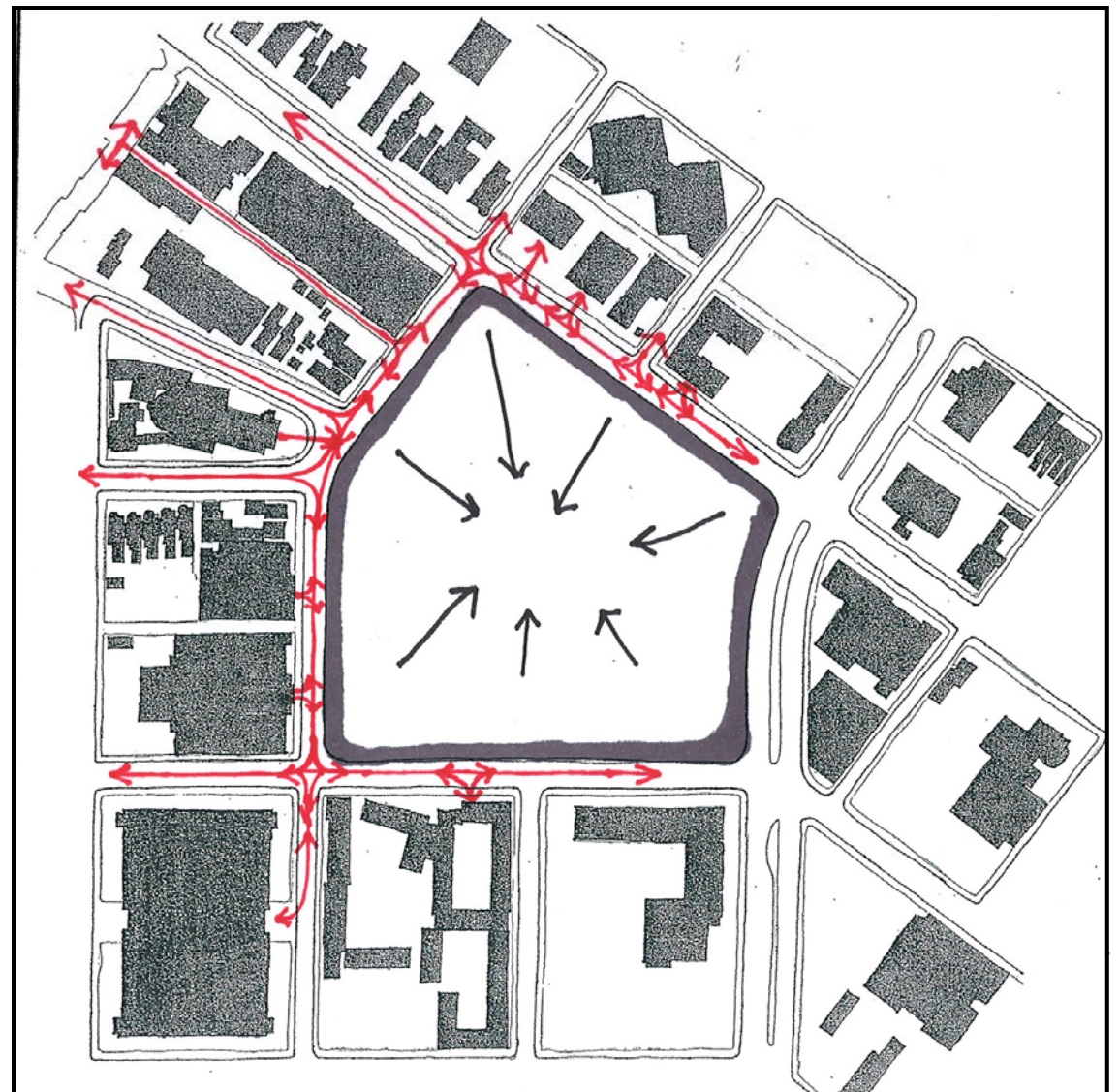
Perhaps most troubling, is the contrast between the park and its surroundings. Activity abounds in the area. Several VCU dormitories surround the park, as well as several university offices and the engineering school. In addition, three churches and a theatre face onto the park. While students and others may use the park from time to time, the flow of energy seems to flow around Monroe park rather than through it. Viewed in terms of composition, the park seems overwhelmed by its surroundings. The lack of strength and vibrance in the park's form adds little to the area. Like Dewey's live organism, it appears that Monroe Park has fallen "out of step with the march of surrounding things."



Sources of energy and activity facing onto Monroe Park. The VCU dormitories, offices, and Engineering School, coupled with the churches, theater, and apartment building which face onto the park, provide the potential for the park to act as an active center for the area. However, Monroe Park's lack of connection to its surroundings lends itself to the perception of the park as a hole in the urban fabric.



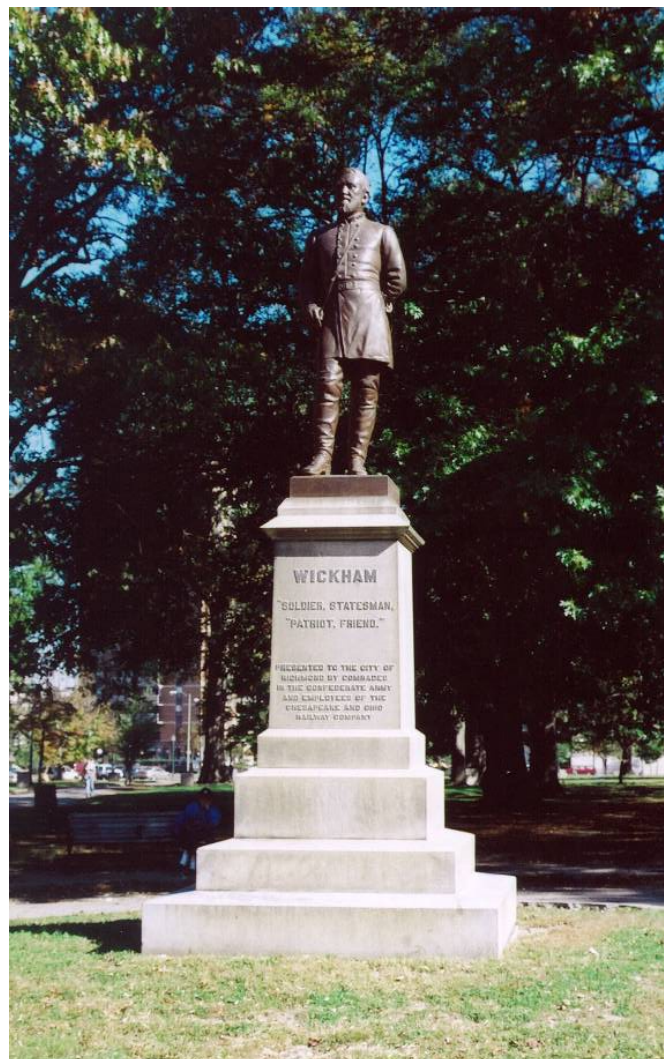
Left, The most used path in Monroe Park, shown in red, provides a direct route from Main Street to W. Franklin Street, cutting out the bend in Laurel Street. The paths shown in yellow, likewise, experience significant use as shortcuts. The paths leading to the center of the park experience significantly less use.



Below, The flow of activity and pedestrian traffic, indicated in red, runs primarily around the park. The radial pattern of paths running to the center of Monroe Park seem to be somehow disconnected from the larger pattern of movement in the area.

CHAPTER 10: INITIAL IMPRESSIONS, POTENTIAL

Monroe Park contains a number of interesting elements — a collection of monuments from different eras, the previously mentioned fountain, and a large number of beautiful, mature trees. The present form of the park does little to capitalize on these elements. Instead, they are drowned out by the overcrowding of trees and monotonous repetition of pattern. However, they suggest existing sources of potential for revealing past attitudes toward the park, and creating interest in new contexts. In addition to the possibilities within, Monroe Park offers occasional glimpses of the potential for drawing in the surrounding area and extending the edges of the park so that the surrounding buildings act as the walls of the park. More distant views offer the opportunity to make connections to the larger city, helping to place Monroe Park and its surroundings in the larger context of Richmond.



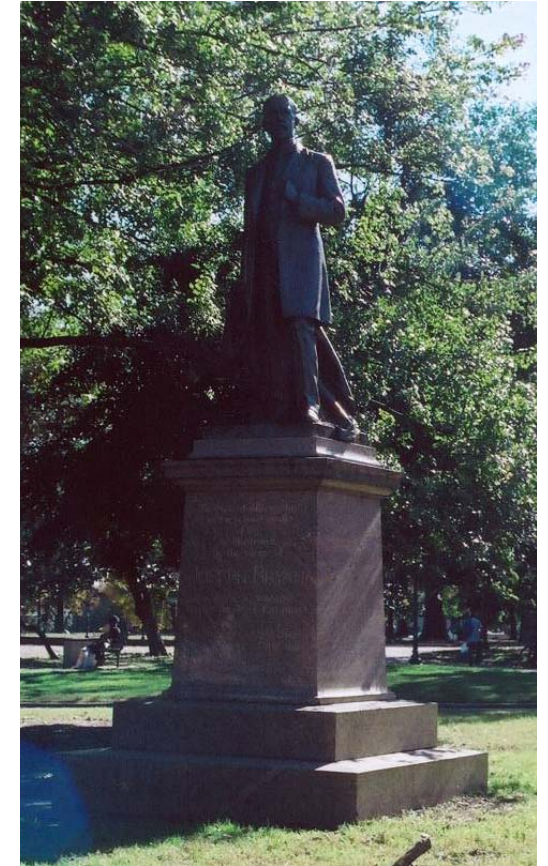
Statue of Confederate General Williams Carter Wickham, left. The Wickham statue, given to the city by his Confederate Army Comrades and by his fellow employees at the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad and dedicated in 1891, was the first monument to find a home in Monroe Park



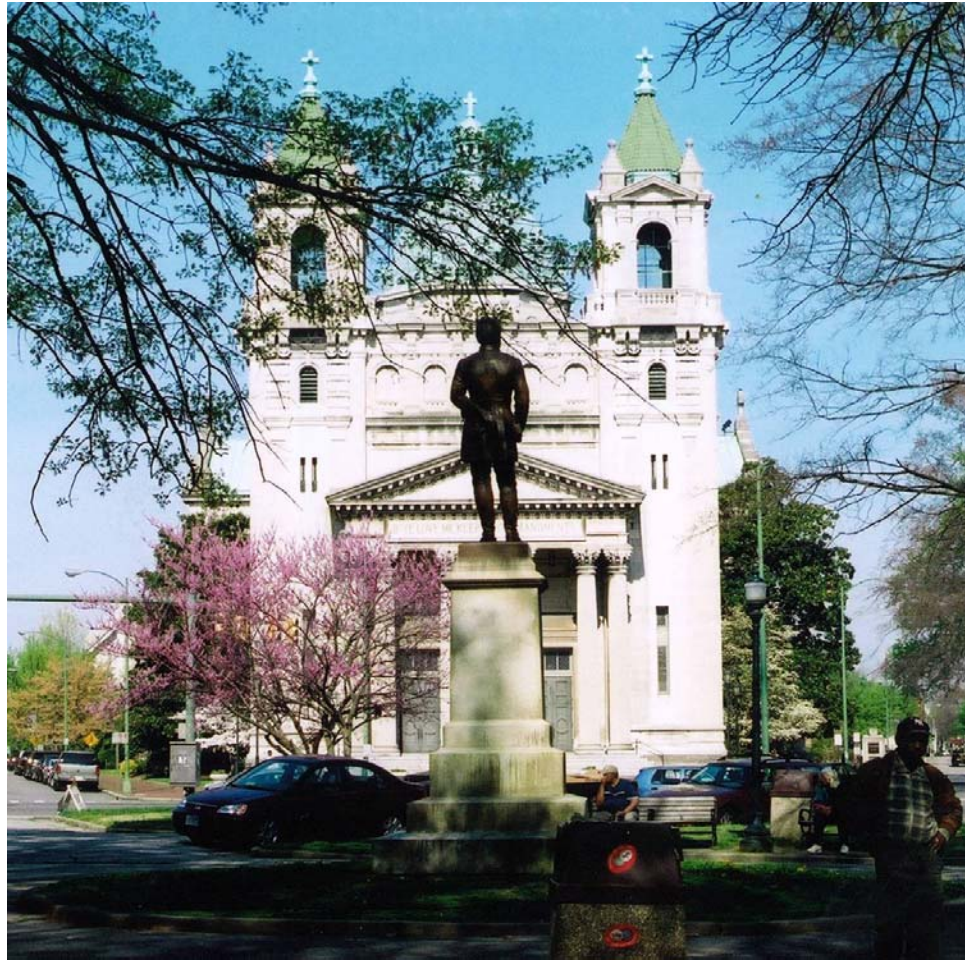
One of the many mature, specimen trees existing in Monroe Park.



Monuments to General Fitzhugh Lee, above, and Joseph Bryan, right, were added to the park in 1911. The monument to Lee commemorates his service in the Spanish-American War. The Bryan statue honors the publisher and business leader with the inscription "To exalted citizenship in private walks of life, as illustrated by the career of Joseph Bryan, this statue is dedicated by the people of Richmond. The character of the citizen is the strength of the state."



The World War II monument, designed by Charles Gillette and erected by the American Legion in 1944, honors the Richmond men and women who sacrificed their lives during the war.



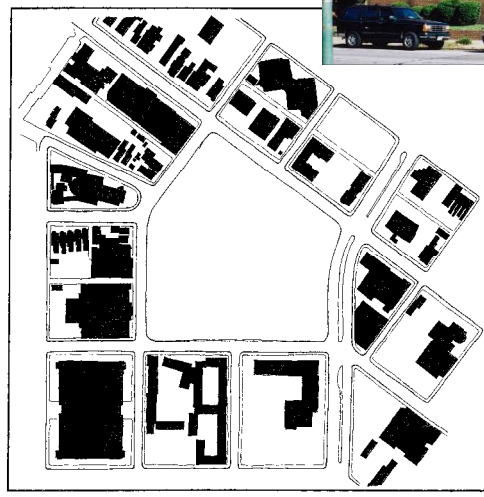
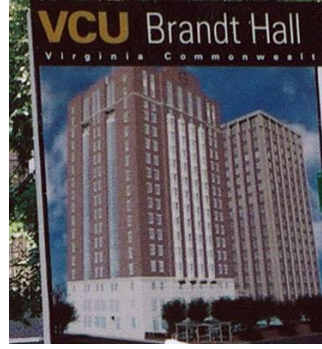
Views of VCU's School of Engineering, below, and the Landmark Theater, bottom, before the trees leaf out in the spring. Opening up these views presents an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between the park and its surroundings.

Views of Sacred Heart Cathedral, left, and VCU's Johnson and Rhoads Halls, above, with the Wickham monument in the foreground. Views such as these provide a glimpse of the potential for incorporating the surrounding architecture into the design of Monroe Park.



View of the skyline of Downtown Richmond looking down Main Street from the southeast corner of Monroe Park.

The diverse collection of buildings surrounding the park, representing eras ranging from the 1870's to today, reflect the layers of development which give the park's environment its unique character. The potential for creating connections between the park and its varied surroundings provides an opportunity for Monroe Park to establish a sense of place, tied to the multiple layers of the past that have given shape to the present.



LAUREL STREET



1. 1912-15, Johnson Hall, VCU Dormitory. Originally the Monroe Terrace Apartments, the first high-rise building around the park, Johnson Hall was acquired by VCU in 1964.



2. Date unknown, Private Residence.



3. 1871, Newberry House, Private Residence.



4. 1906, Sacred Heart Cathedral.



5. 1874, Offices for the Catholic Church.



6. 1894, Grace and Holy Trinity Episcopal Church.



7. 1927, Landmark Theater. Originally built as an ACCA Temple, the building was acquired by the City of Richmond in 1940 and converted to a theater.

MAIN STREET AND BELVIDERE STREET



8. 1980, VCU Main Street Parking Deck



10. 1996, VCU School of Engineering



11. 1959, Vacant Hotel Building and Parking Deck.



12. 1970, Monroe Park Towers, Apartments and Retail.



9. 1979-1984, Gladding Residence Center, VCU Dormitory. The building includes the façade of the Branch Public Baths built in 1911.

WEST FRANKLIN STREET



13. 1871, Lindsey House. VCU Offices.



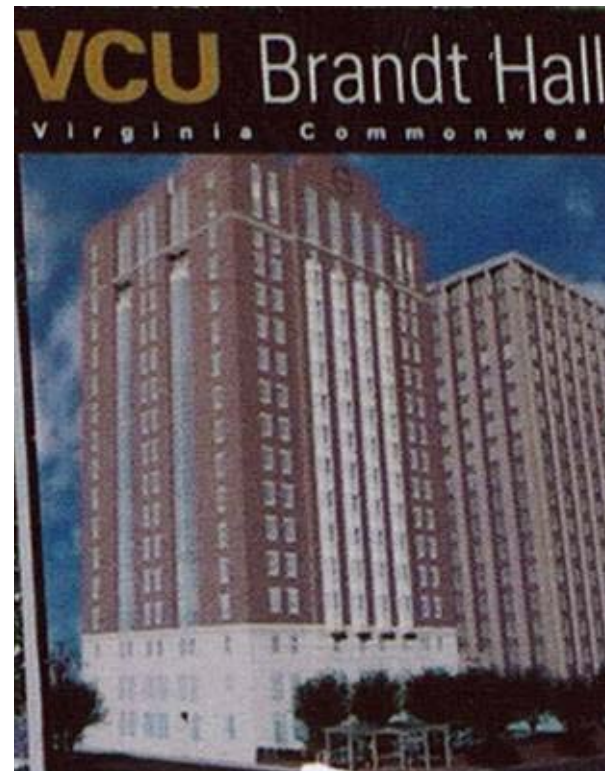
15. Late 1960's, Pace Methodist Church. The original church, built in 1886, was destroyed by fire in 1966. The separate low bell tower to the right of the church sits on the foundation of one of the original church spires.



14. 1929, The Prestwold, Apartments.



16. 1968, Rhoads Hall, VCU Dormitory.



17. 2005, Brandt Hall, VCU Dormitory.



18. 1890, Williams House, VCU Offices.

Sporadic use of Monroe Park, particularly by VCU students, as a place to play catch, study, and congregate with friends often appears to occur in spite of the present form. Activity in the other public spaces around the VCU campus far outweighs the use of the park. However, the occasional use of the park, and the overall engagement with public space in the area, hold the promise of an available audience for an improved Monroe Park.

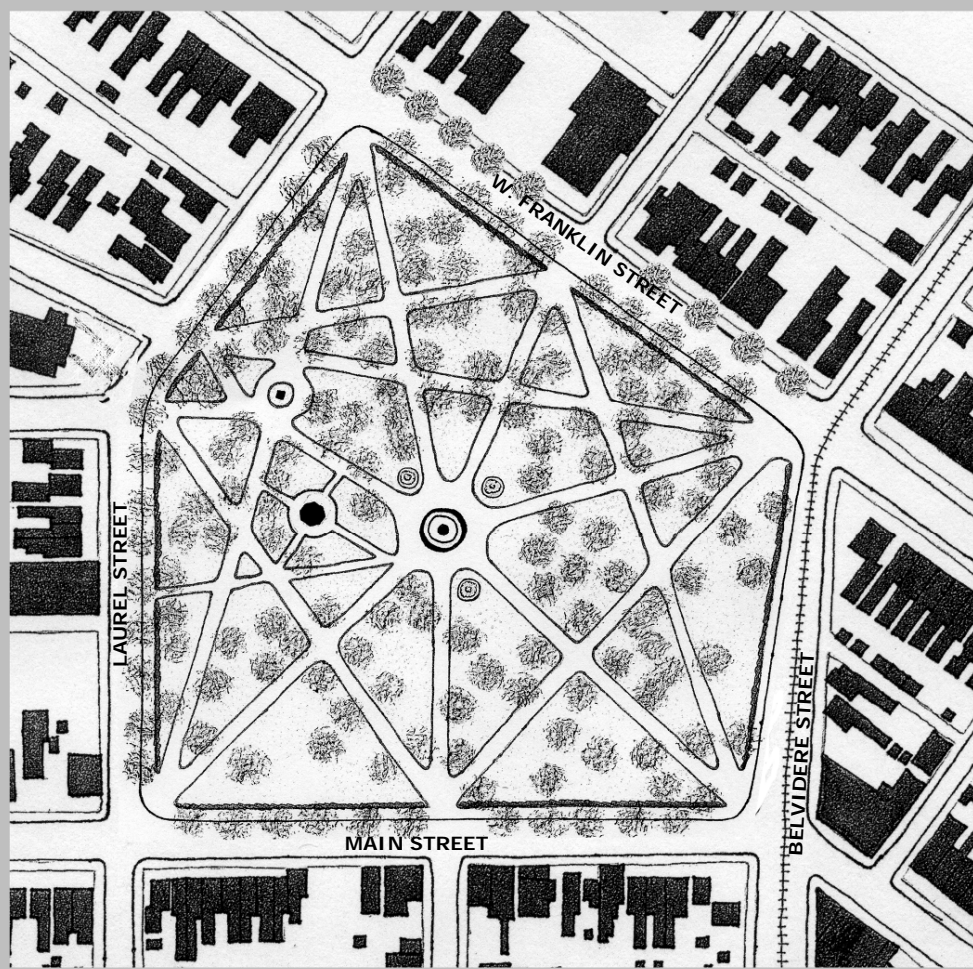


The Monument Avenue 10k race has used Monroe Park as headquarters throughout the history of the race. While large numbers of people have been exposed to the park through this event, few leave with any strong impressions of the place. However, these scenes prompt visions of how the park could enhance the race and the experience of its participants, rather than acting merely as a backdrop to the event.

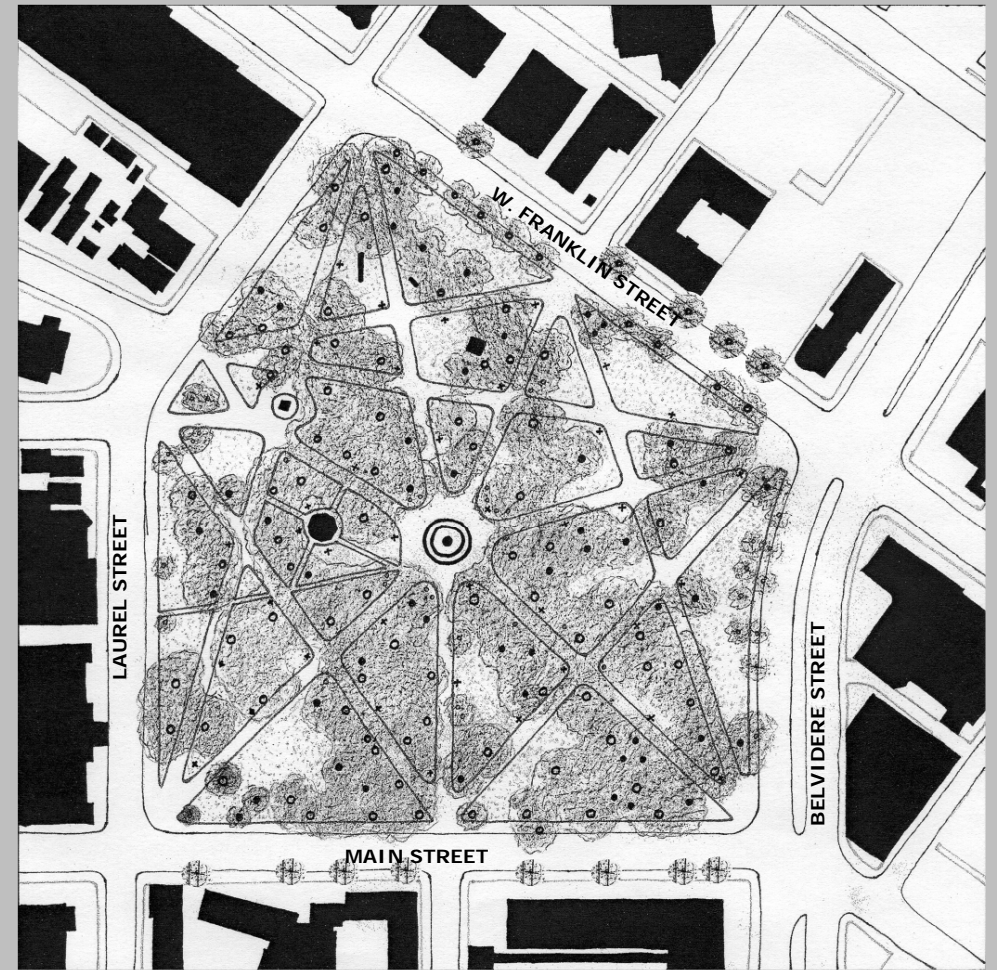
CHAPTER 11: PARK STUDIES

Initial impressions of Monroe Park suggested that a combination of neglect, homogeneity of design, and weak connections to surrounding areas lay at the root of the park's problems in the present. The contrast between present conditions and the park's earlier success raised questions about what had changed. The natural place to start was with the park itself. A series of diagrams showing the park at different points in its history— compiled from photographs, aerial photography, plans, and direct observation — presented a means of comparing the general composition of the park over time.

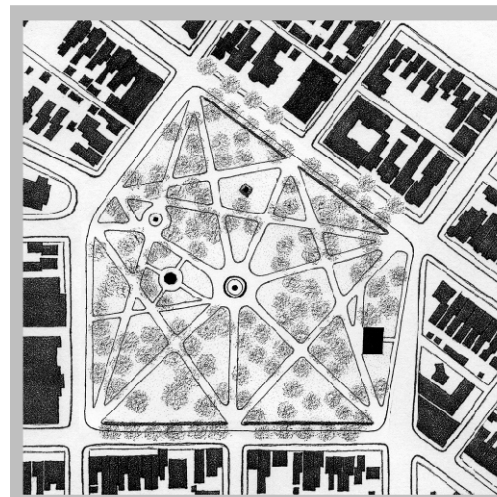
The first thing that jumps out from a comparison of these diagrams is how constant the structure of the park has been over time. The combination of paths radiating out from the central fountain and paths running between street intersections around the park has remained essentially unchanged since at least 1905.



1905



2003



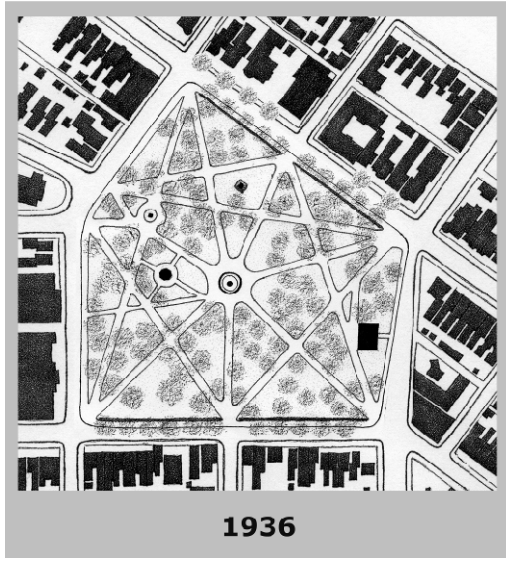
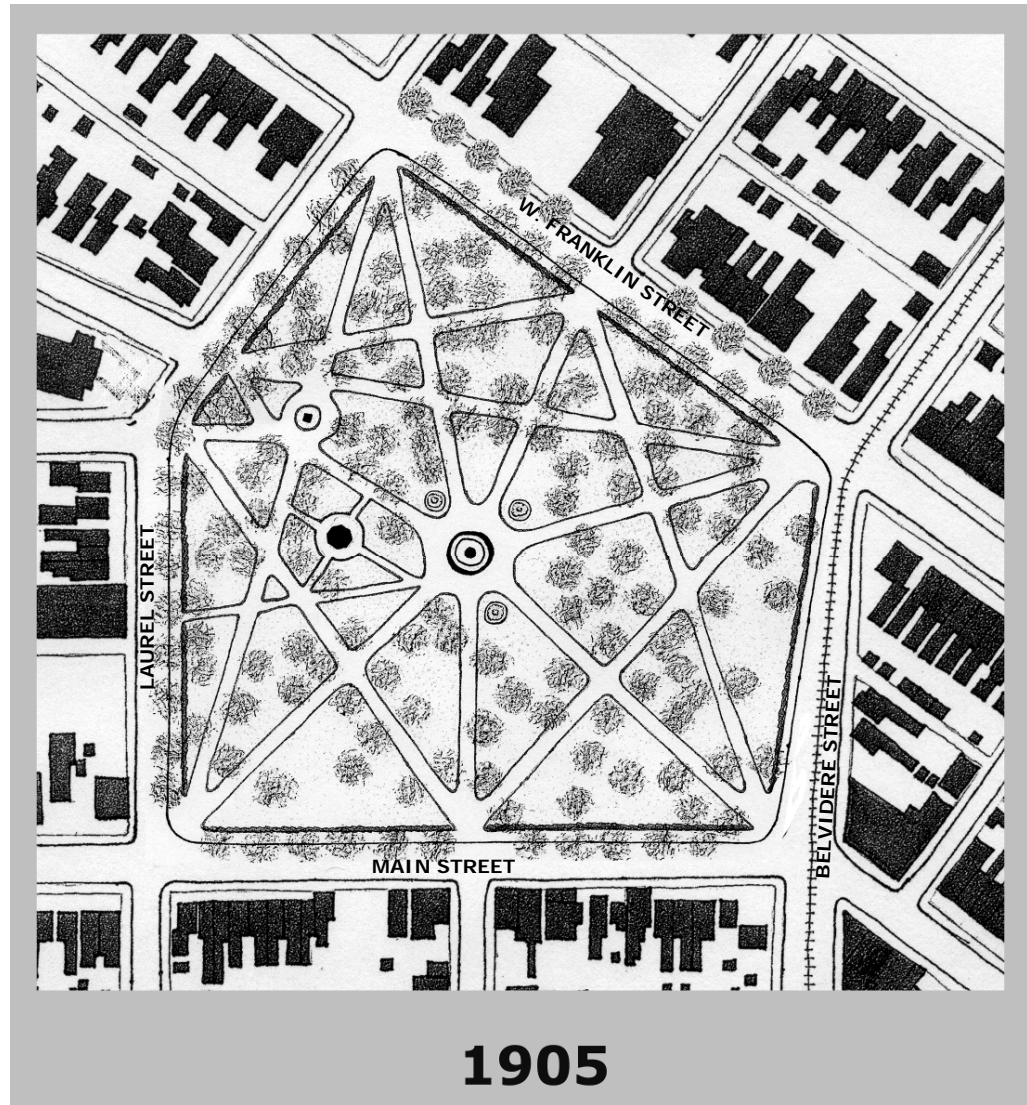
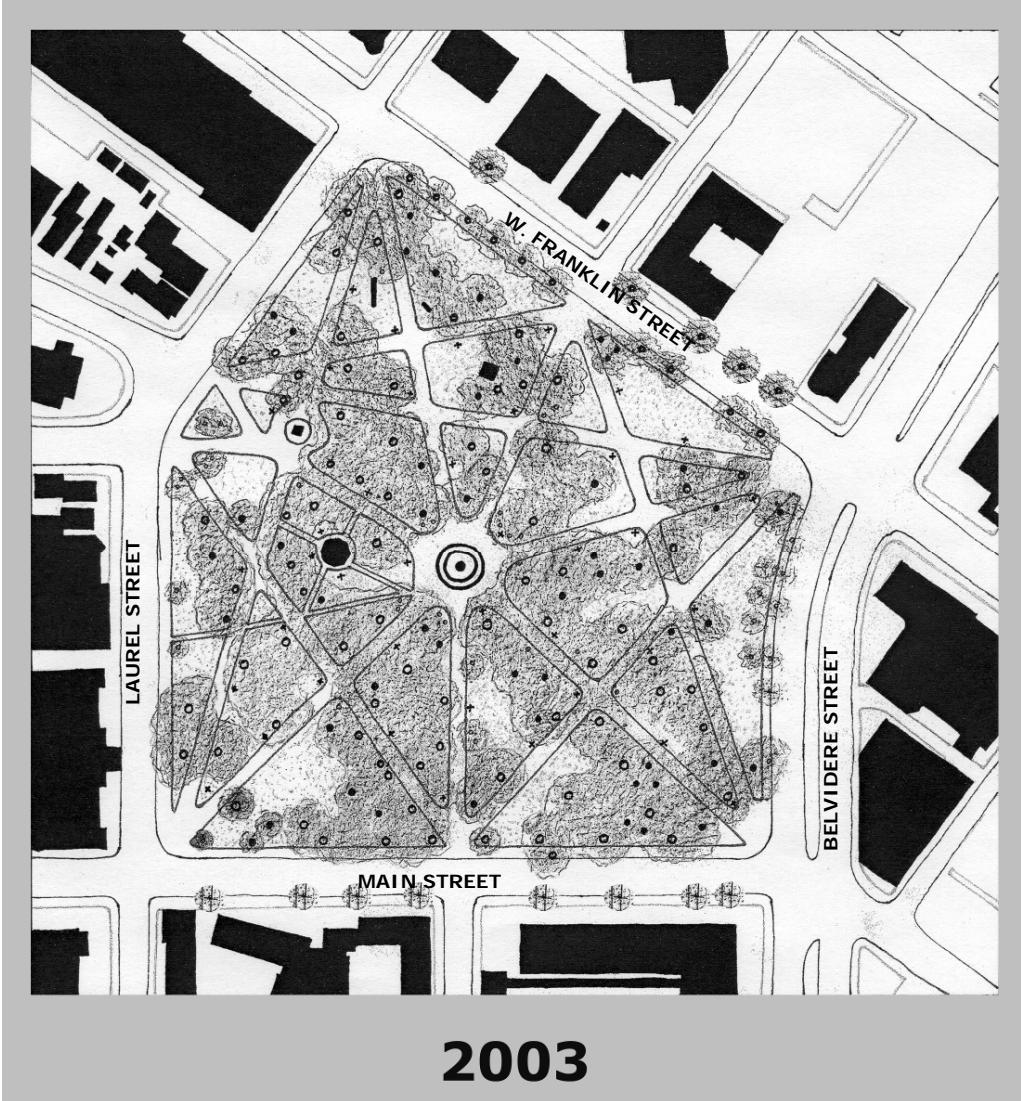
1936



1953

The second thing that stands out is the increased density of tree cover in the 2003 diagram in comparison to the earlier diagrams, reinforcing initial impressions regarding the tree canopy. In the earlier diagrams, one gets the sense of lawn punctuated by trees. In 2003, the trees have grown together to a point that they dominate the composition of the park.

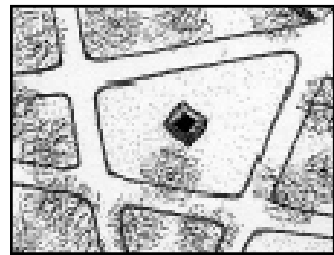
Other changes show up over the course of time. The hedges and planting beds present in the 1905 diagram disappear over time. The Richmond central alarm building appears in the 1936 and 1953 diagrams, disappearing with the widening of Belvidere Street prior to the 2003 diagram. Two playground areas, indicated by dotted outlines, appear in the 1953 diagram, suggesting an attempt to adapt to changing uses of the park. Among these changes, the loss of variety in planting, coupled with the overgrown tree plantings, presents the greatest change in Monroe Park's composition.



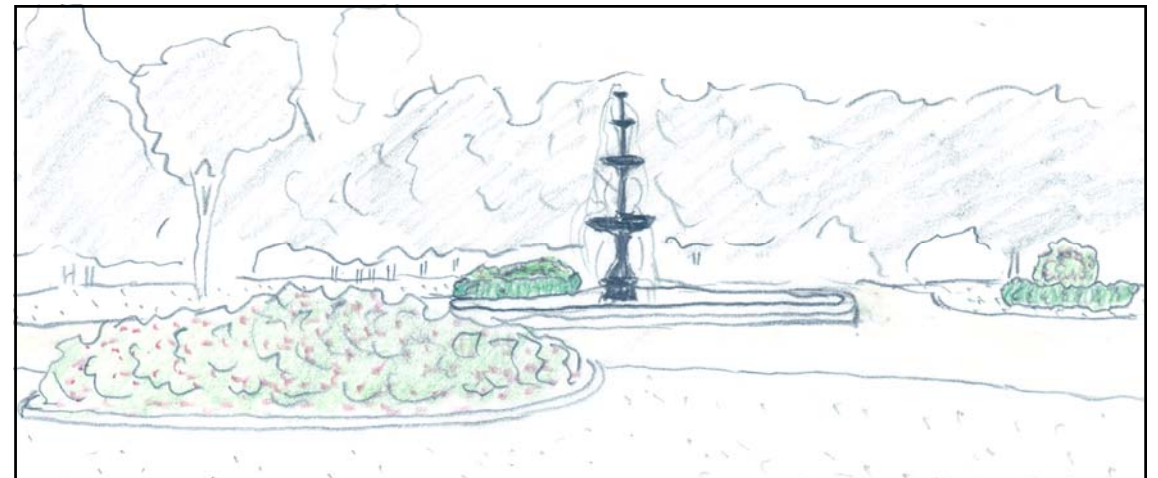
The relative openness of the park in the earlier diagrams provides greater definition to individual elements of the park, allowing recognition of both the parts and the whole. The variety of plantings in 1905, and to a lesser extent in 1936, provide interest and help to establish a hierarchy of spaces. The dense tree plantings and lack of variety in the present park, by comparison, come across as a single homogenous mass. Rather than emphasizing elements of interest, such as the fountain and collection of monuments, the current composition of the park creates a situation where these elements struggle to be noticed amidst the trees. The poor definition of individual elements and lack of variety in the present Monroe Park reduces the vibrance of the composition and diminishes the park's presence in the urban landscape.



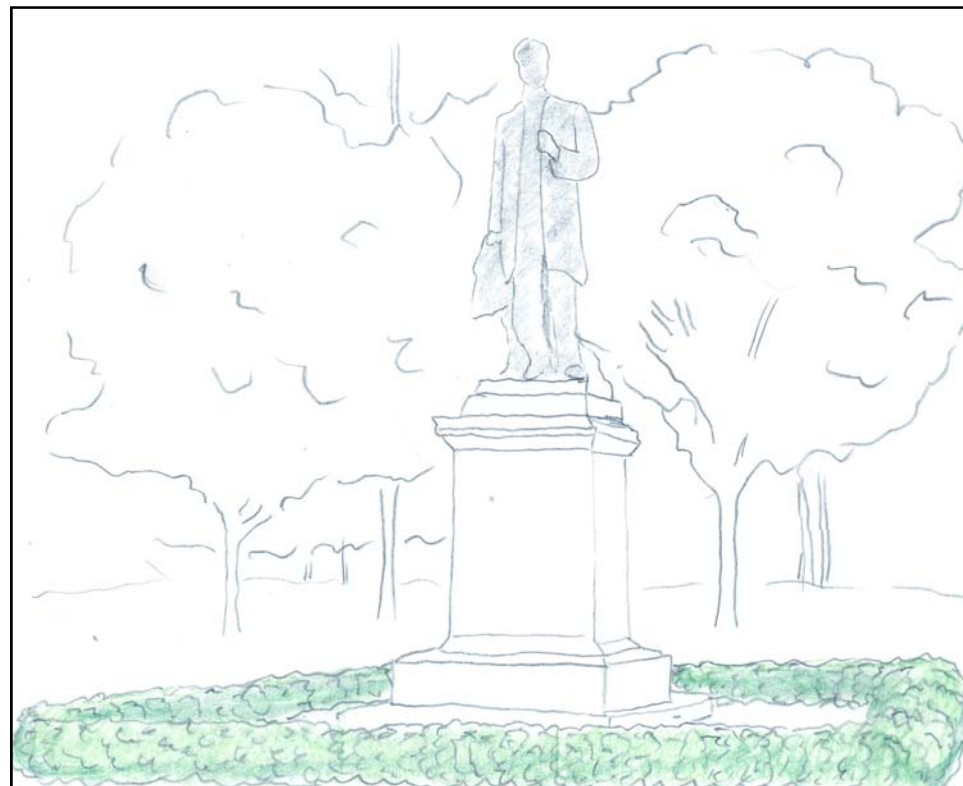
Strong parts lend themselves to a strong whole, while lack of definition leads to “muddy” compositions.



Enlargement of Joseph Bryan monument from 1936 diagram, left, and sketch of monument (based on photo from Valentine Richmond History Center). The addition of a simple hedge and the open lawn surrounding the monument help provide emphasis.



Sketch of fountain area, early 1900's (based on postcard from Valentine Richmond History Center), and Fountain area today. The openness of the fountain area and the variety of planting provide a stronger definition of space compared with the present fountain area.



CHAPTER 12: SURROUNDING AREA STUDIES

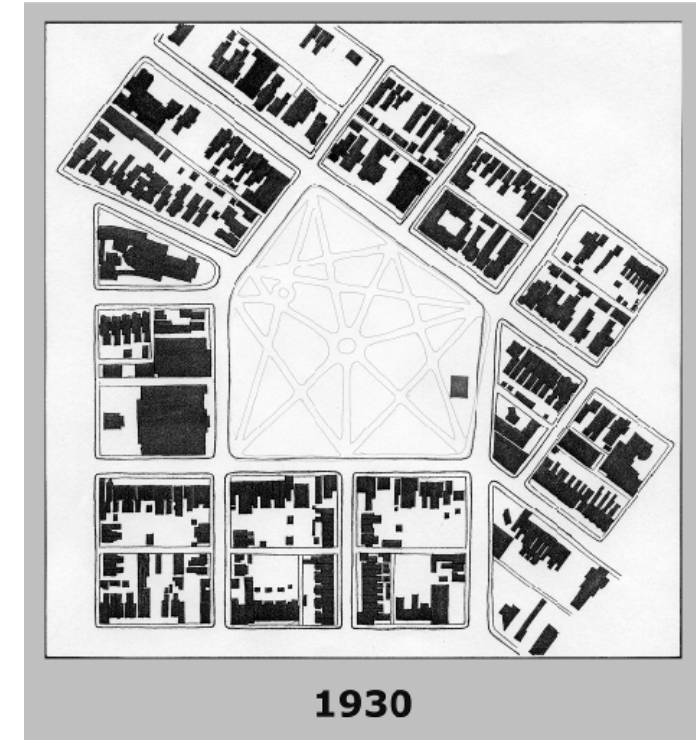
Change and continuity within the park tell only part of the story. Monroe Park's perceived lack of connection to its surroundings in the present raised questions about how the development of the surrounding area contributed both to earlier periods of success and current circumstances. A series of figure-ground diagrams showing the area immediately surrounding the park — compiled from maps, insurance maps, and GIS information — provided a means of comparing the composition of the area over time.

A comparison of the diagrams shows a distinct change in the physical environment of the area surrounding the park. The 1890 diagram shows a relatively uniform, fine grained urban fabric consisting of primarily of small scale structures. Between 1890 and 1965 there is a gradual shift toward larger scale buildings. Throughout this period the mix of large and small scale buildings continued to form a relatively dense urban fabric around the park. The 2003 diagram shows a more dramatic transformation of the physical environment. The mix of large scale buildings and open areas surrounding the park creates a more coarsely grained urban fabric. A shift in scale in elevation corresponds to the shift seen in the diagrams, adding another element to the transformation of the area. Monroe Park, relatively unchanged since the 1890's, finds itself in the middle of a composition that bears little resemblance to the composition at that point in time.



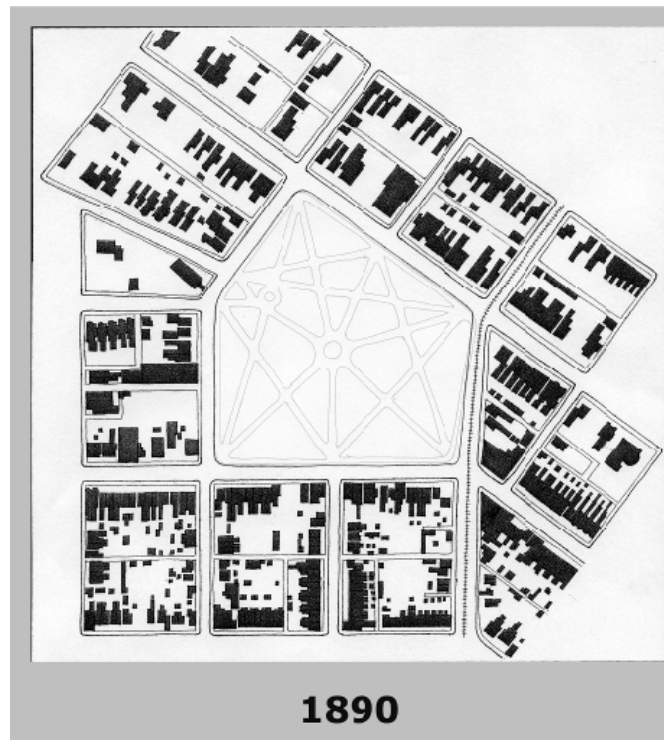
1867

The change in density between 1867 and 1890 shows a realization of the park founder's desire to promote growth in the area. The open area of Monroe Park stands out amidst the relatively dense, uniform urban fabric of the area in 1890.

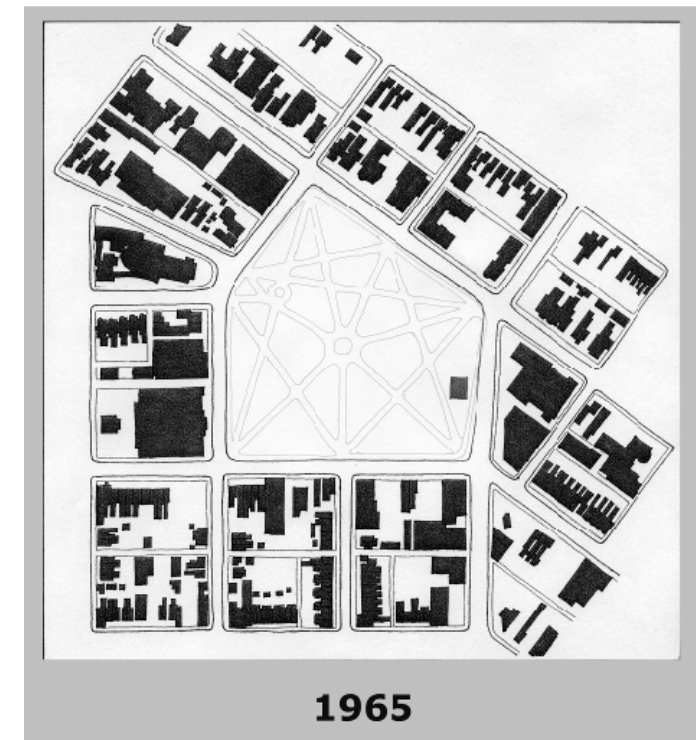


1930

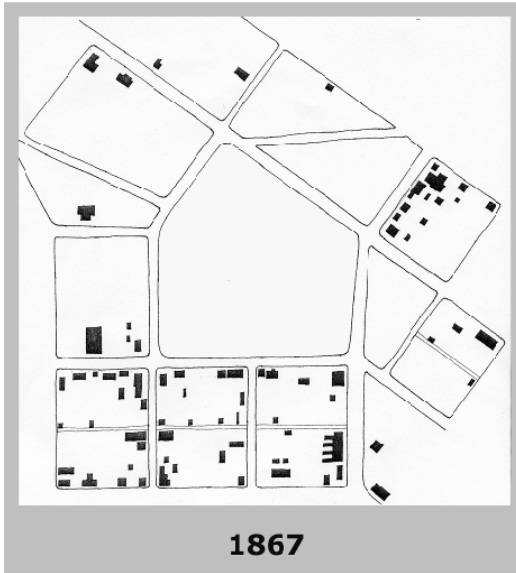
In 1930 and 1965, the diagrams show an increase in scale of the buildings surrounding the park. While this change in scale creates a more coarsely grained urban fabric, the density of the surrounding area still provides a strong contrast to the open area of Monroe Park.



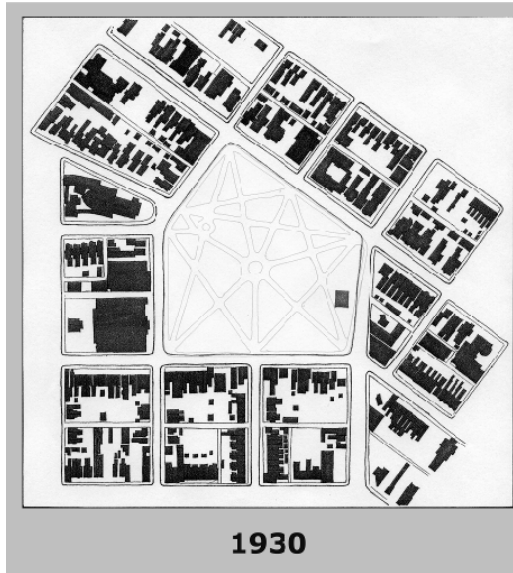
1890



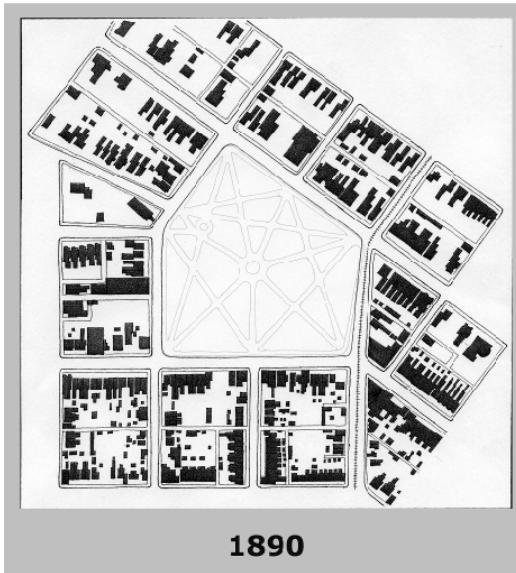
1965



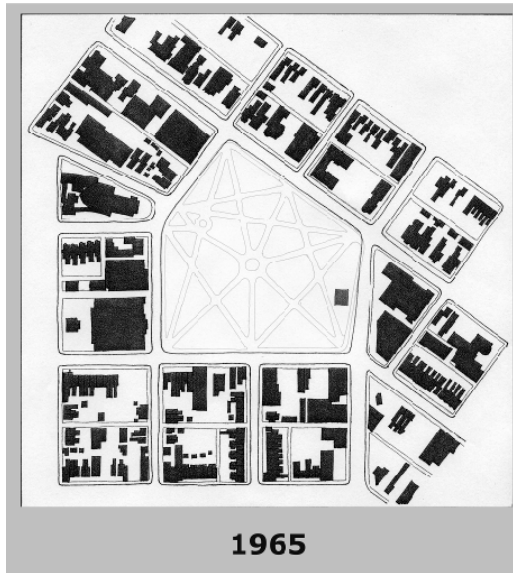
1867



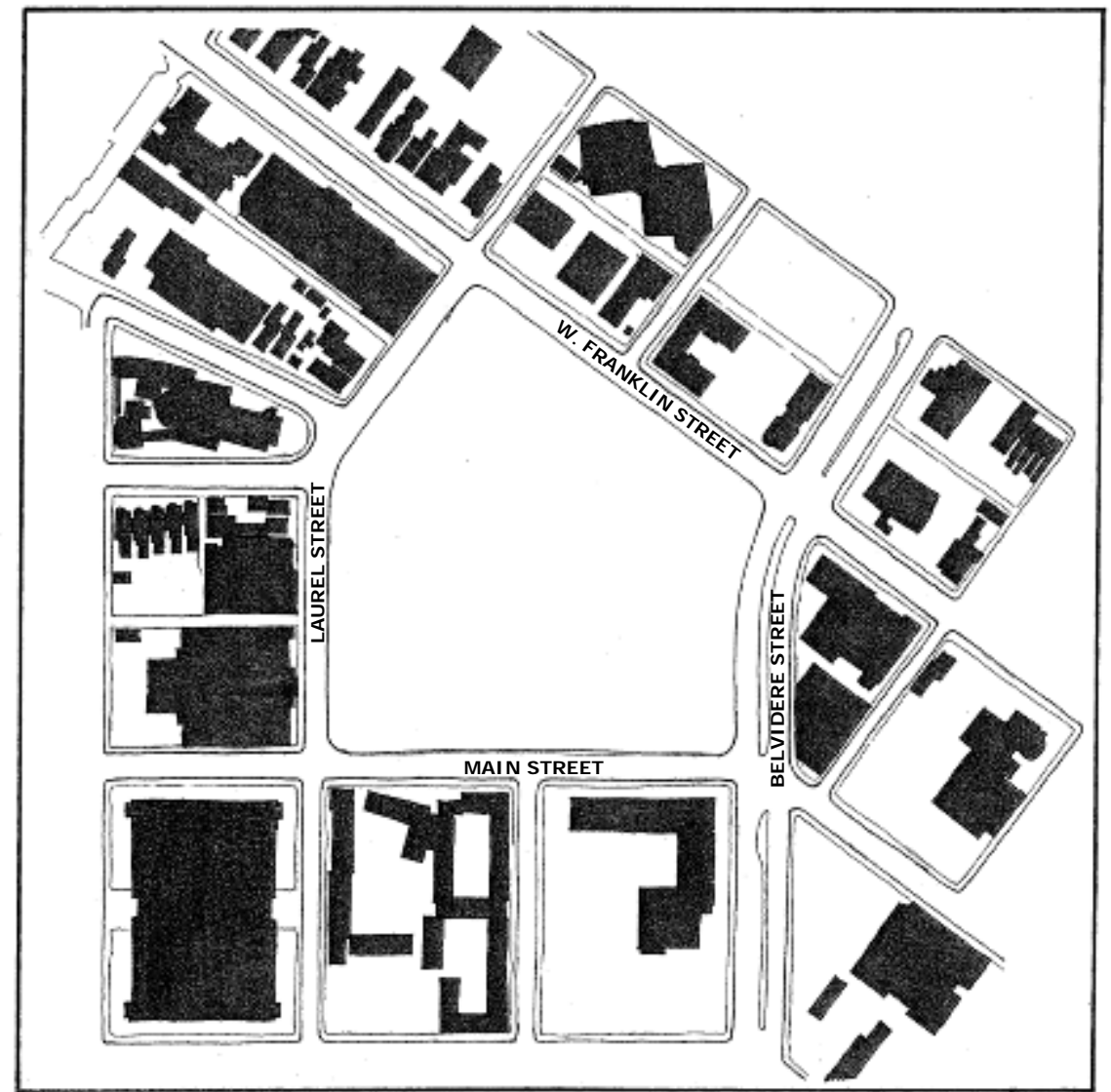
1930



1890



1965



Above, the 2003 diagram stands out in comparison to the earlier diagrams. Large scale structures have become the norm around the park. The diagram also shows more open areas, the majority of which represent parking lots. The presence of fewer, albeit larger, buildings and the greater proportion of open space combine to create a much more coarsely grained urban fabric, diminishing the sense of density in the area.

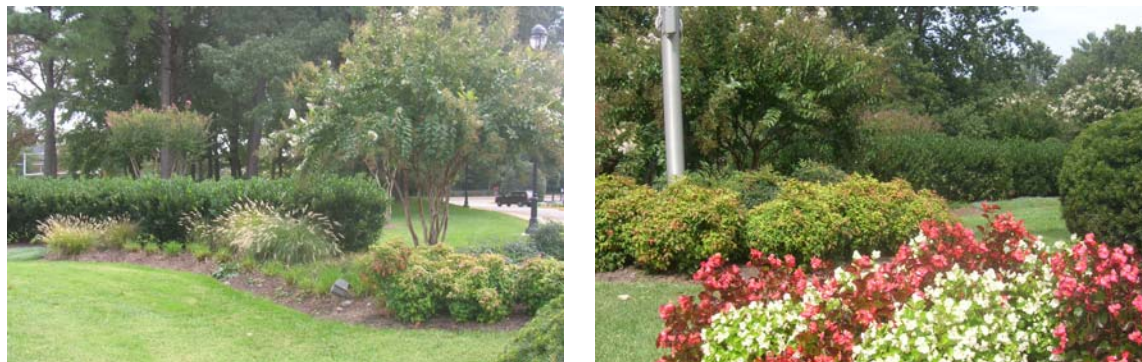
The change in the scale of buildings surrounding the park shows up in the height of the buildings as well. Far left, rowhouse construction typical of earlier periods in the park's history. Left, VCU Engineering School.

CHAPTER 13: DESIGN THOUGHTS, PART I

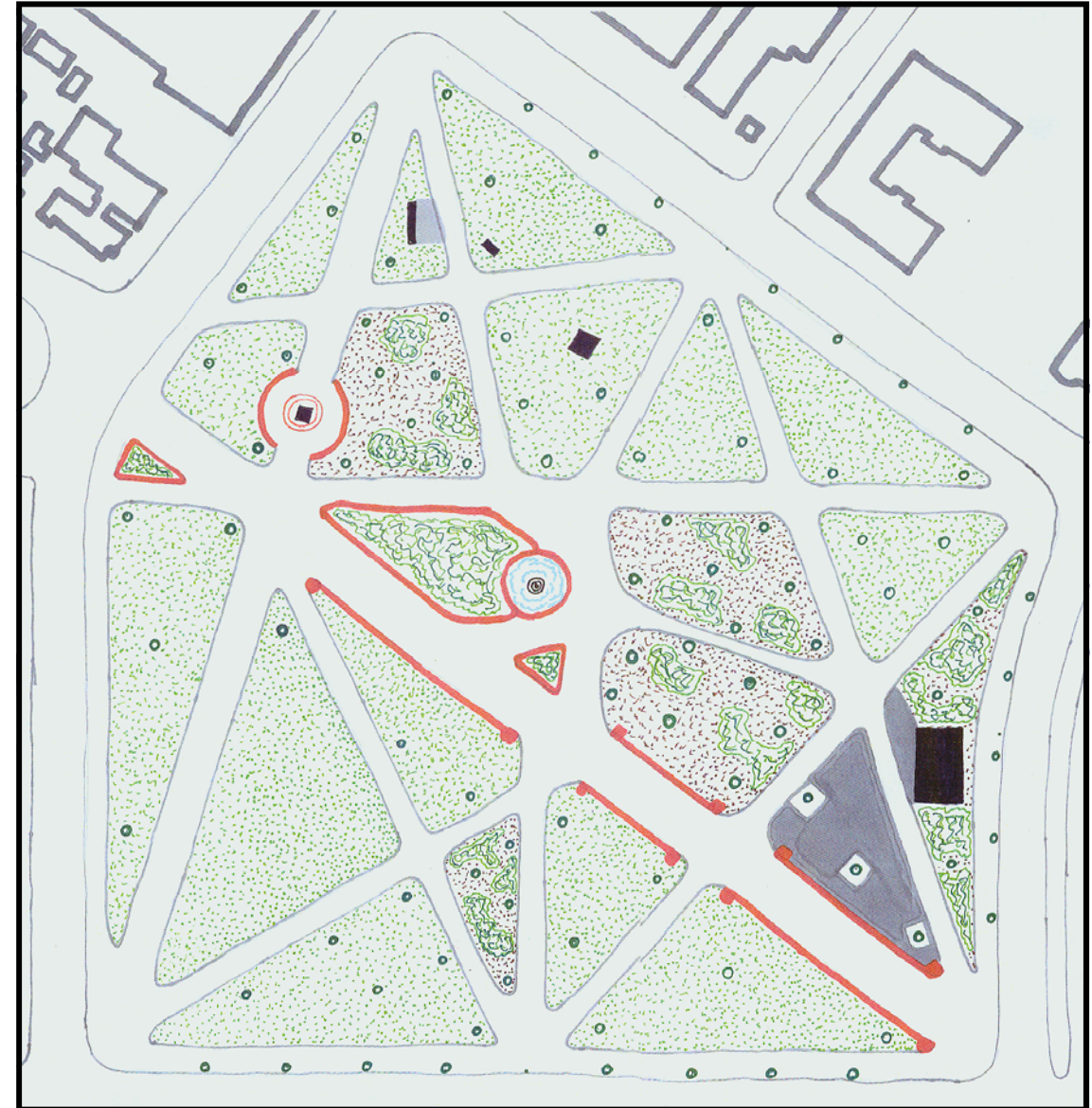
Throughout the process of analyzing present conditions and researching the development of the park and its surroundings over time, information was translated into design ideas for Monroe Park. Early design thoughts focused on the changing composition of the immediate surrounding area and initial impressions regarding the need to open up the park and the overall homogeneity of the park.

Looking at the 1890-1905 diagrams, the park's design representing a single idea encompassing a large piece of land presented an interesting contrast to the uniform, fine grained urban fabric which surrounded it. This contrast provided a source of strength to the park within the composition of the area as a whole. In the present, this source of strength has eroded. Without this obvious contrast of scale the park is overwhelmed by the large scale buildings surrounding it.

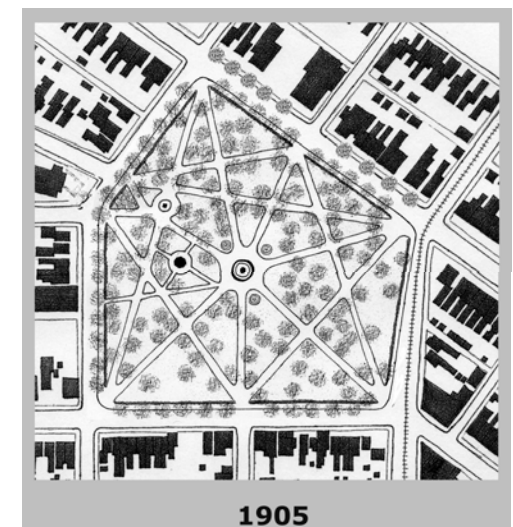
The design shown here addresses this issue by adding variety to the existing structure of the park. The path system has been maintained with minor changes to institute some hierarchy among the paths. The spaces created by the paths have been treated in varying ways. Some have remained lawn punctuated by trees. Others have become garden areas or hardscaped plazas. The stands of trees have been thinned to open up the park. The reduction in tree canopy serves several purposes. First, it helps to return definition to the individual elements making up the park. Second, it puts greater emphasis on the floor plane of the park, providing a contrast to the tall buildings around the park. Finally, it draws the surrounding buildings in as part of the composition of the park. This final point plays an important role in providing the opportunity to gain an understanding of the changes that have effected the area. The surrounding buildings provide a palimpsest showing evidence of different stages in the development of the area. The park provides a source of orientation, both physically and temporally, by presenting broad views of its surroundings.



The addition of garden areas adds interest and variety lacking in the present design of Monroe Park. Strategically placed, the garden areas also help to define spaces within the park.



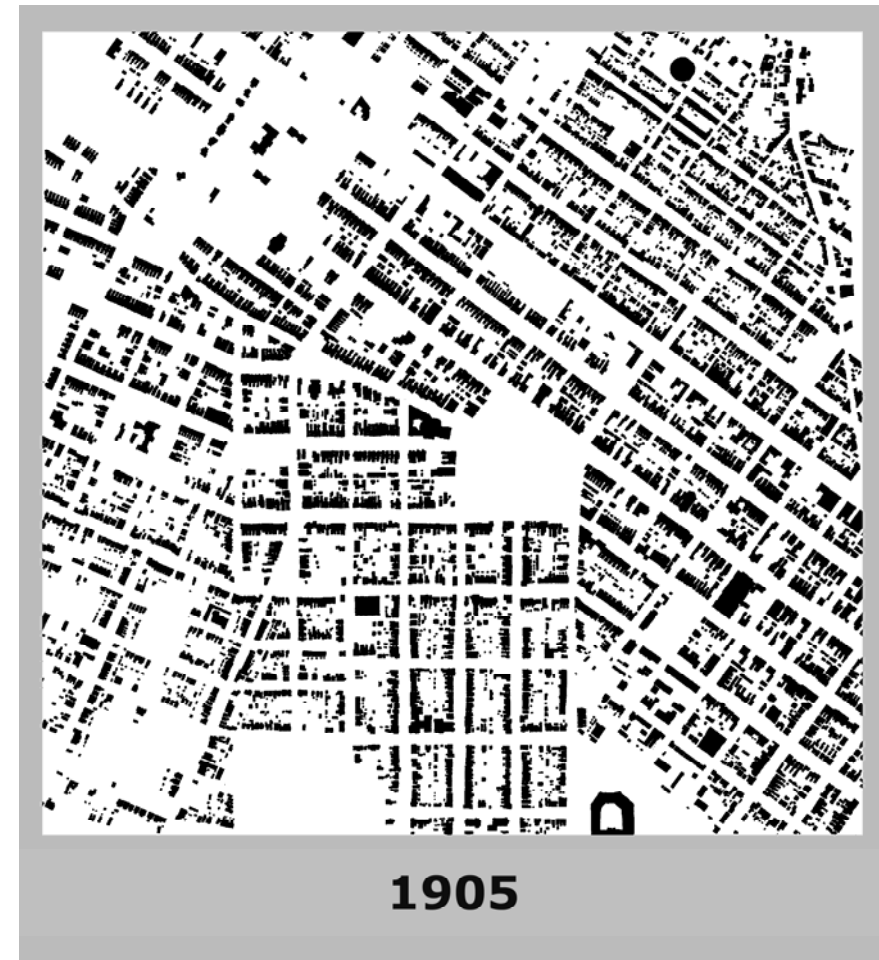
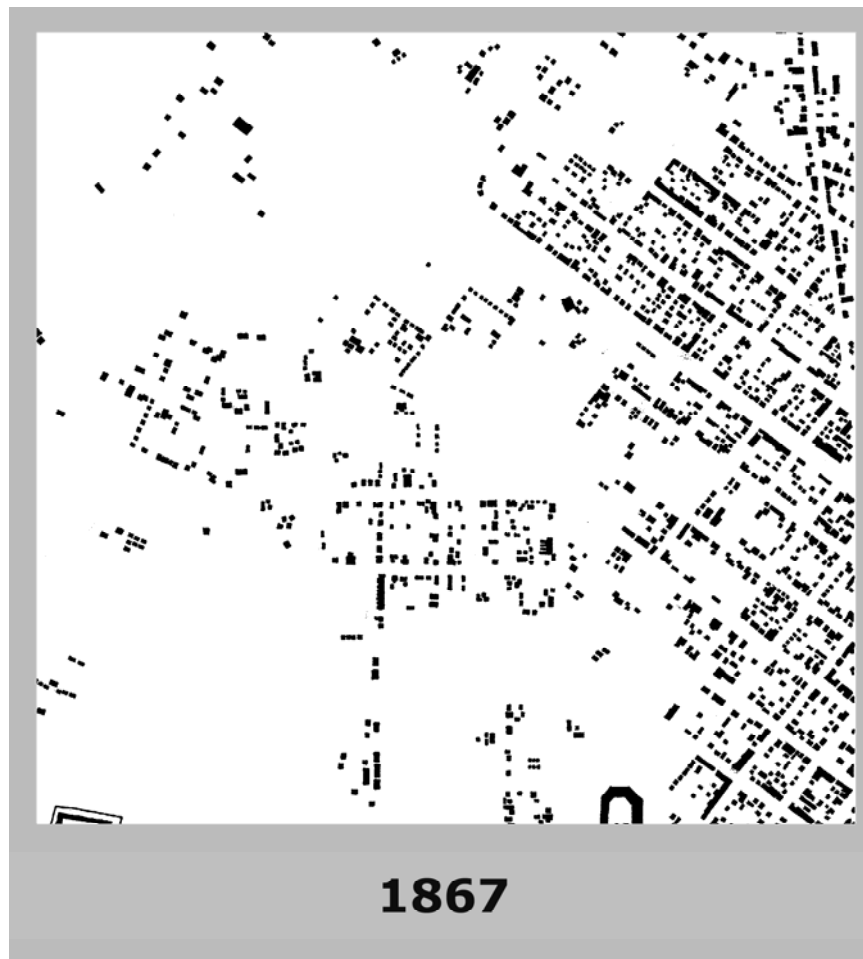
Above, Plan for Monroe Park showing early design thoughts. The design seeks to recapture the openness and variety of planting found in the park in 1905, right. The increased variety of spaces, and fullness of the design, is aimed at providing the park with a source of strength in the composition of the area, rather than simply relying on the park's role as open space.



CHAPTER 14: SQUARE MILE STUDIES

The blocks directly adjacent to Monroe Park have the potential to be incorporated more directly into the design of the park, but the park's context stretches out beyond these blocks. In an effort to gain better understanding of the park's relationship to its surroundings the scope of the figure-ground studies was enlarged to cover a square mile around the park. Both the process of creating these diagrams and analysis of the final product provided a better feel for the process of development in this area.

In the 1867 diagram the outline of Monroe Park is barely perceptible amidst the open space to the west of Richmond. The potential for development and the need for expansion is visible in the contrast between the areas to the east and west of the park.



The dramatic change between 1867 and 1905 reveals a new phase of growth and expansion for Richmond. It becomes easy to imagine an understanding of the park as a defining landmark for this new section of the city. The 1905 diagram clearly shows the shift in the grid system at Monroe Park. The street grid of Richmond ends abruptly at the Oregon Hill neighborhood south of the park. North of the park Richmond's street grid is continuous. To the west, these competing street grids form the fan pattern for which the Fan District is named. Monroe Park, located at the base of the fan, aids in the smooth transition from one pattern to the other. While the shift in street grids and new development in the area seem to mark Monroe Park as a point of transition in the city, the park can also be clearly seen as a center for the area as a whole. The radial design of the park, and the equal treatment given to the edges of the park, begin to make sense in light of the uniform urban fabric apparent in the 1905 diagram. The open space of the park appears to belong equally to all of the sections of the city which surround it. The density and fine grained fabric of the city on all sides of the park reinforce the idea that the large homogenous open space of Monroe Park established its presence in contrast to its surroundings. One can sense the park's ability to act as a pressure valve, providing relief from the density of the city.

The open space of Monroe Park still stands out in contrast to the density of the surrounding area in the 1965 diagram. Likewise, the park is still clearly recognizable as the base of the fan. However, the consistency of the urban fabric shows signs of change. The fine grain of the urban fabric is now broken up by pockets of larger scale buildings, particularly to the East and along Broad Street to the North. This shift suggests a change in use and character in these areas. It is possible that this change may have reinforced the park's role as a landmark marking a point of change from one area to another.

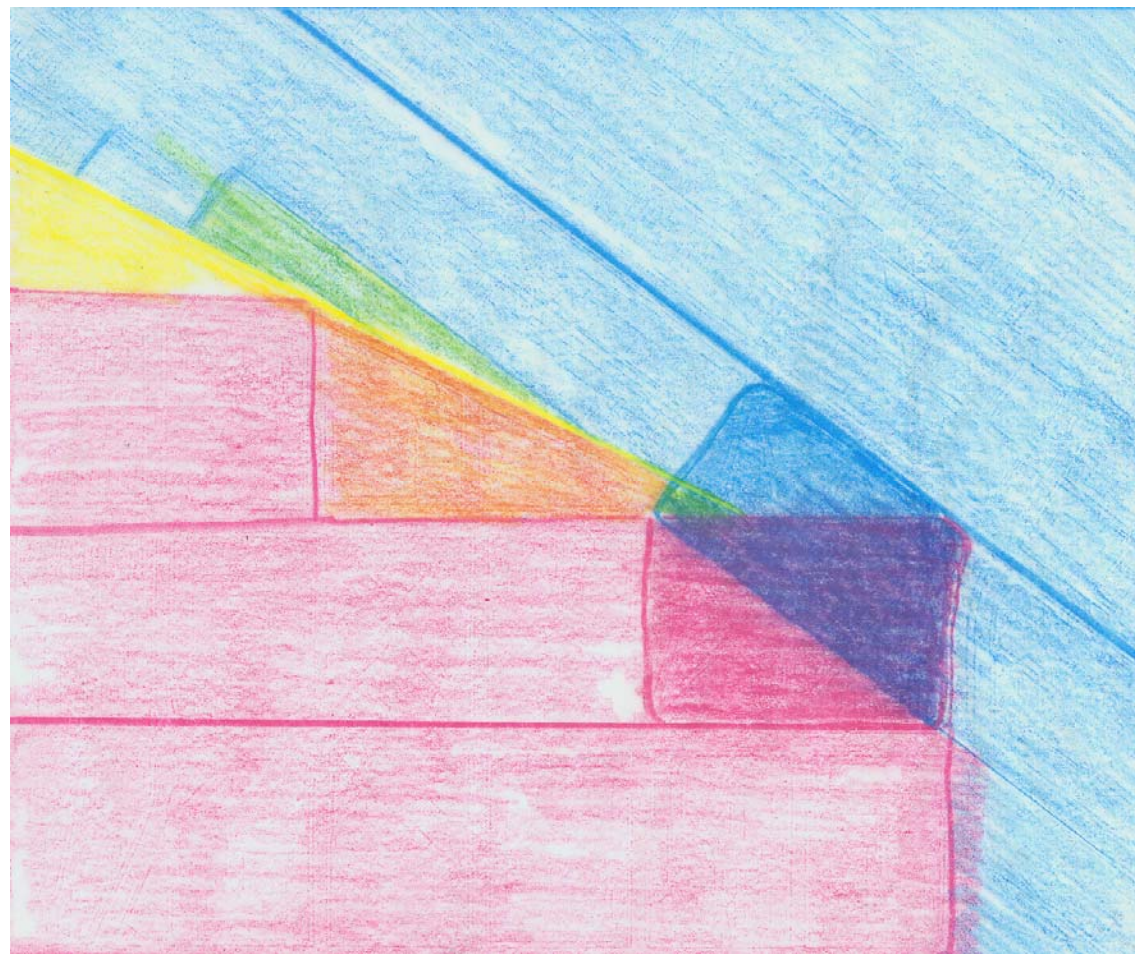
During the creation of the 1965 diagram certain buildings and groups of buildings were immediately recognizable from the 1905 diagram. Recognition of these areas of continuity provided a context which aided in understanding the changes which had occurred over the preceding sixty years. By comparison, the dramatic changes represented in the 2003 diagram in many cases seemed to completely wipe away any connection to the past.



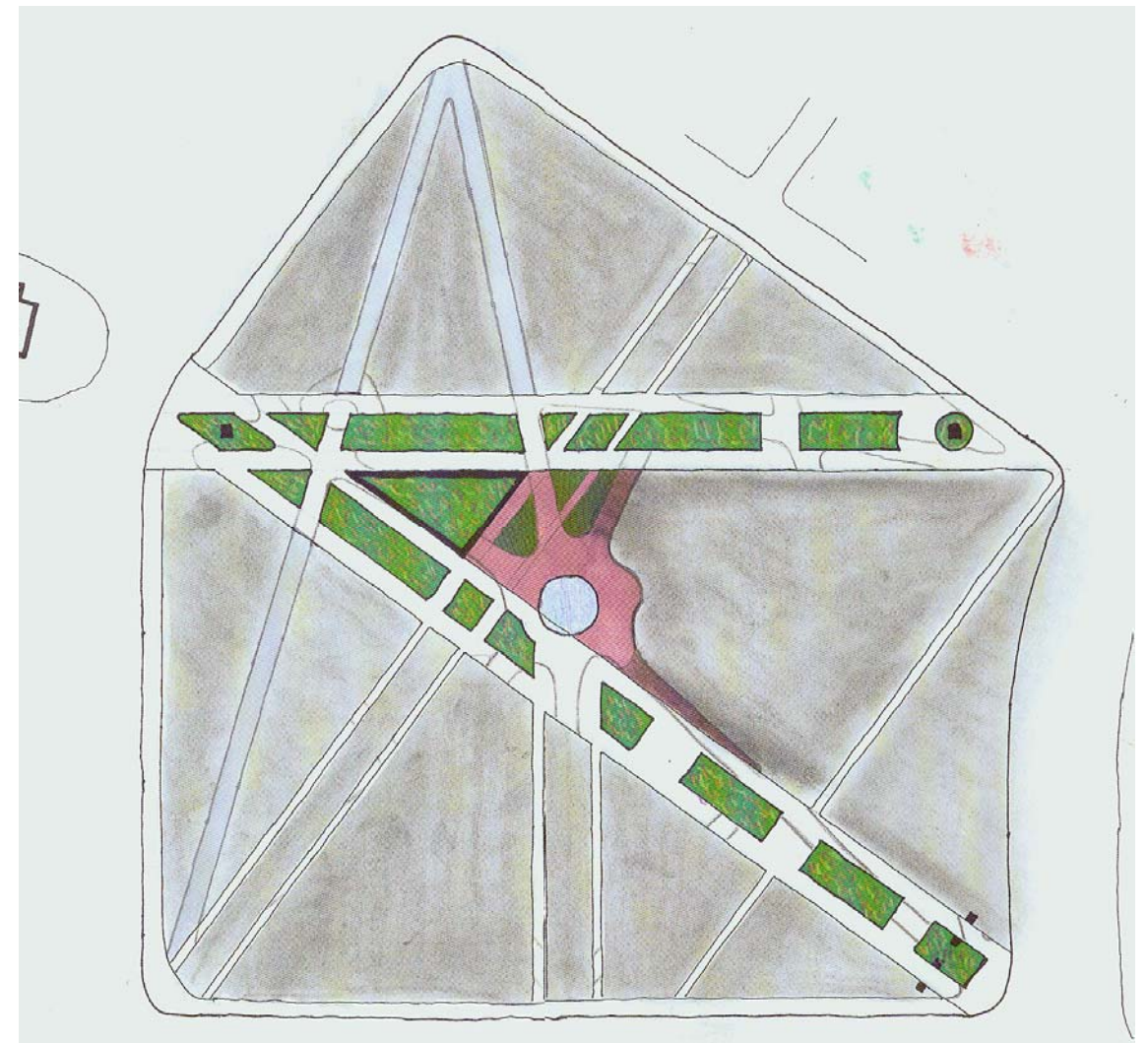
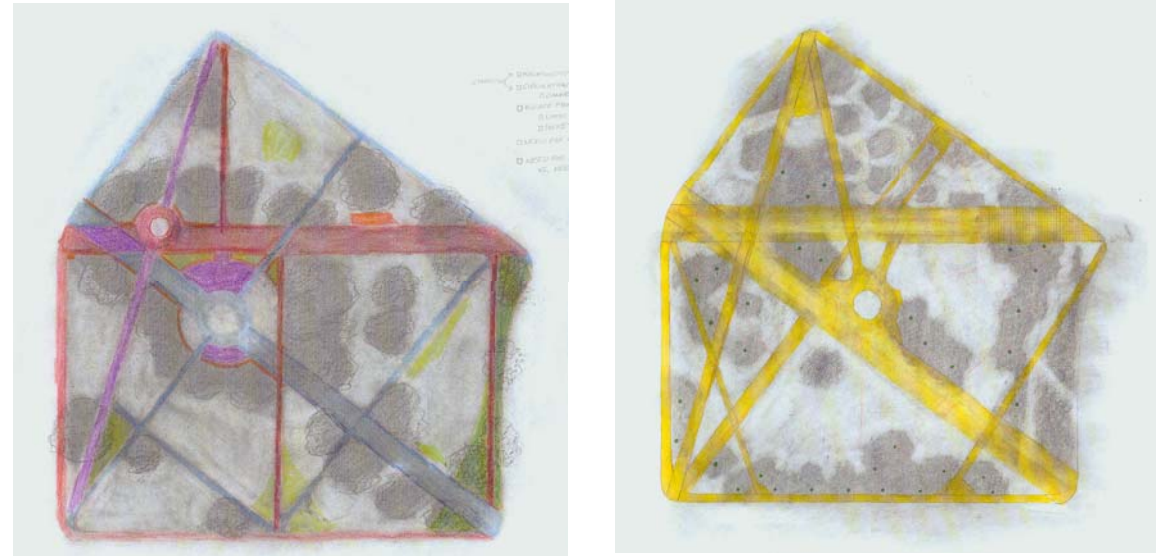
One is immediately struck by the lack of density and corresponding coarse grain of the urban fabric in the 2003 diagram. While much of the open space consists of paved surfaces, the lack of density does minimize Monroe Park's previous role as a source of relief from the density of the city. The Downtown Expressway, seen as a strip of white space to the South, effectively cuts off the park from the Oregon Hill neighborhood. The large scale buildings associated with VCU to the East obscure the park's connection to the Fan District. Overall, the area surrounding the park appears more divided than it did in either the 1905 or 1965 diagrams. Monroe Park seems to float with no solid connection to any of the segmented areas surrounding it.

CHAPTER 15: DESIGN THOUGHTS, PART II

Analysis of the square mile diagrams suggested that not only had the contrast in scale between the park and its surroundings changed, but also its contrast to the density of its surroundings. Simply opening up the park and providing more variety seemed to provide little hope of reestablishing connections. The radial design of the park, which had made so much sense in the early 1900's, now seemed only to highlight what had been lost. Experimentation with a new path structure highlighting the transition of the street grid at the park presented one possible way to reveal the park's earlier role as a point of transition, while providing a source of much needed orientation amidst the segmented surroundings. The new path structure had the added benefit of introducing a sense of movement to the design that had been lacking in the radial design. Rather than retreating into itself, the new paths helped reorient the focus of the park outward to the surrounding area.

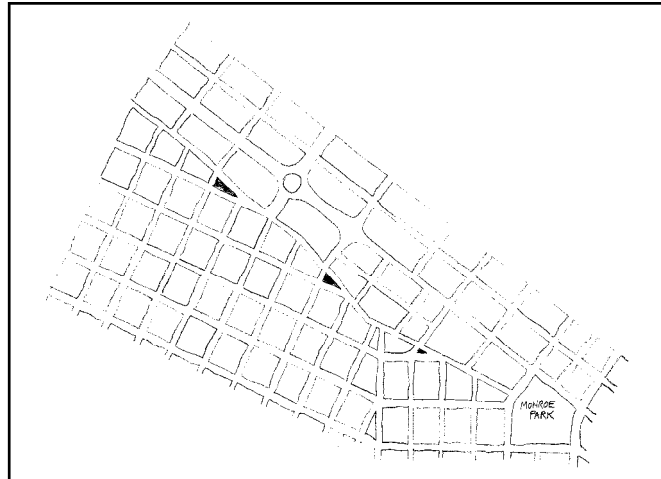


Study of patterns produced by competing street grids. Carrying the street grids through the park presented one possibility for reconnecting the park to its surroundings.



Design studies for new path structure. Exploration into a new alignment of paths opened up new possibilities for redefining space within the park and relationships to the surrounding area.

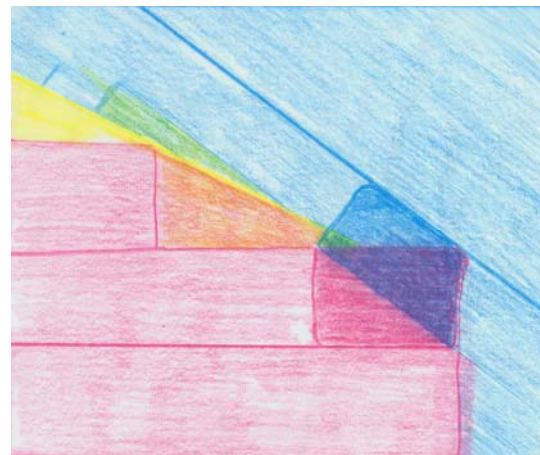
Opportunities to define Monroe Park in contrast to its surroundings appeared unpromising given the existing contrast between large buildings and open lots. Instead, reestablishing harmony in the composition of the area seemed to depend on strengthening the park's design to compliment its surroundings. Existing uses of the park suggested that at least part of the park needed to be lawn. However, the realization that the increase in larger buildings, particularly on the VCU campus, had been accompanied by an increase in green space suggested a new avenue for design. The transformation of part of the park into an urban plaza provided a strong element which complimented the more modern buildings around the park. The introduction of an urban plaza also provided a strong contrast with the remaining lawn areas punctuated by trees representative of the old park. This contrast of old and new was carried on in the preservation of the old path system and the introduction of new paths oriented with the street grid. The form and location of the plaza continues the pattern of triangle parks running through the Fan District emphasizing the new path structure.



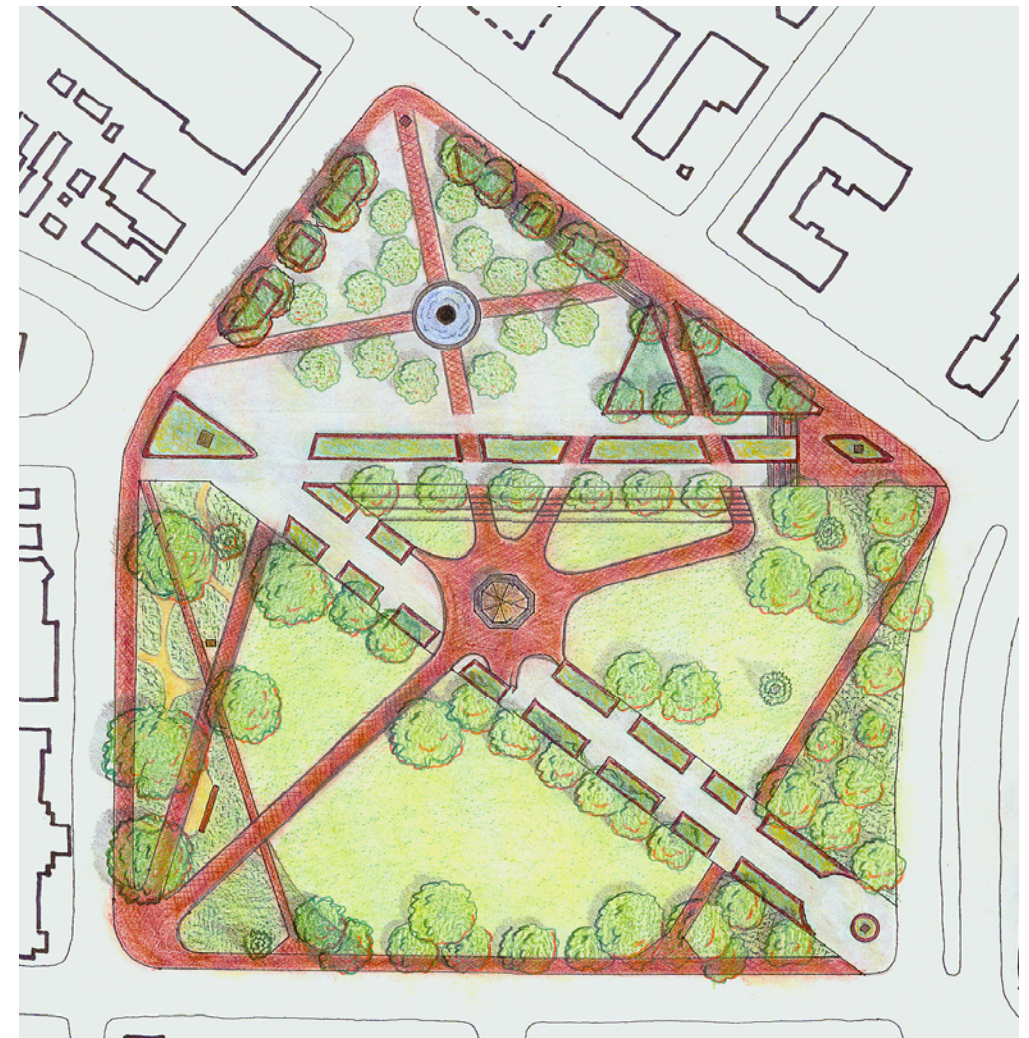
Pattern of triangle parks stretching back from Monroe Park through the Fan District.



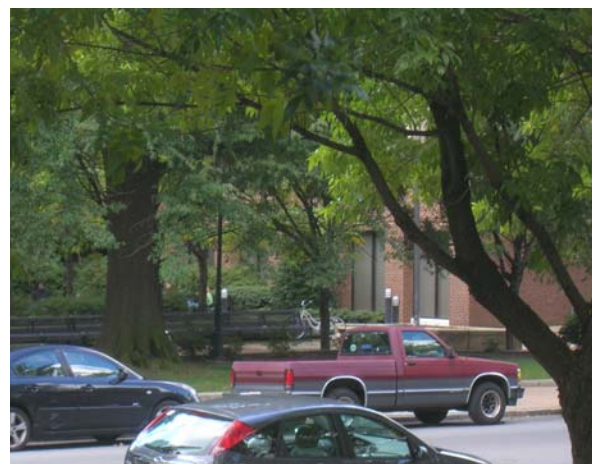
Triangle park located at the edge of the VCU campus.



A study of the competing street grids suggested the definition of spaces seen in the design to the right.



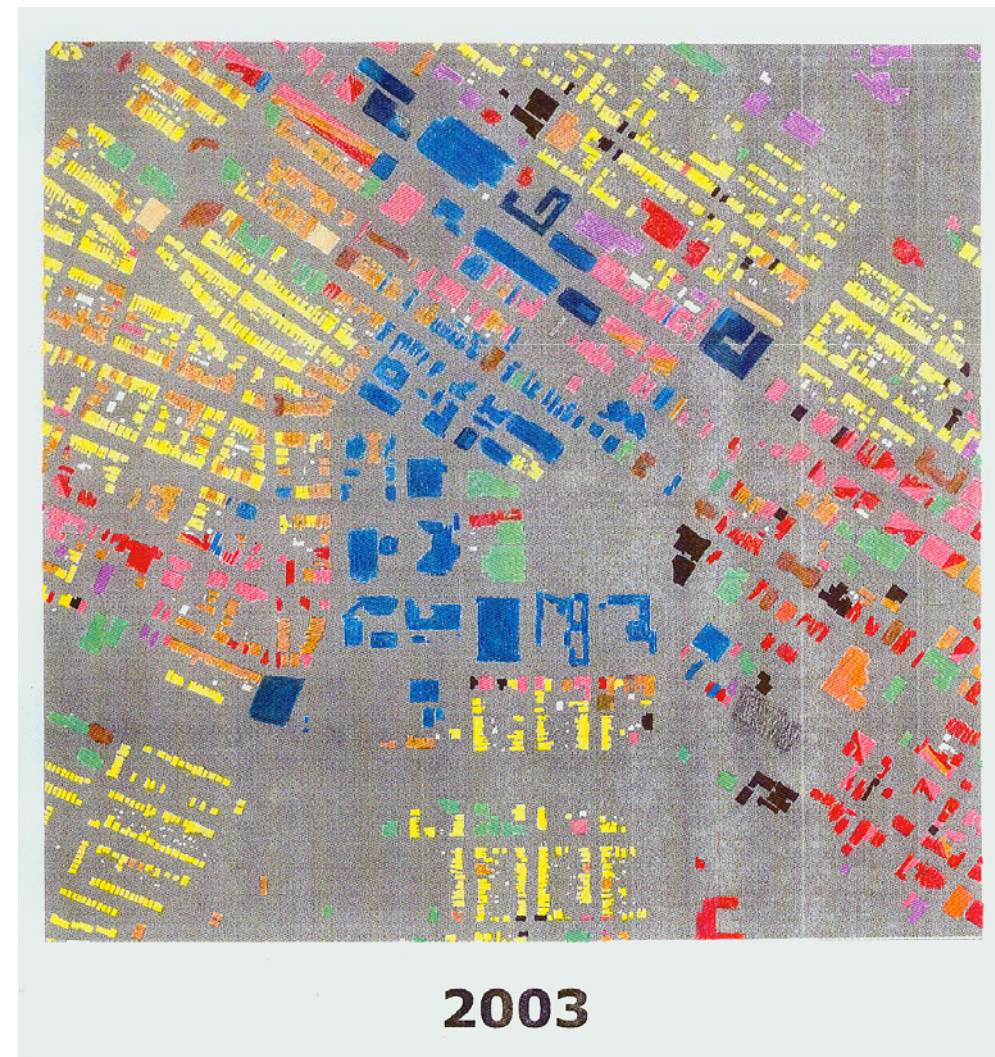
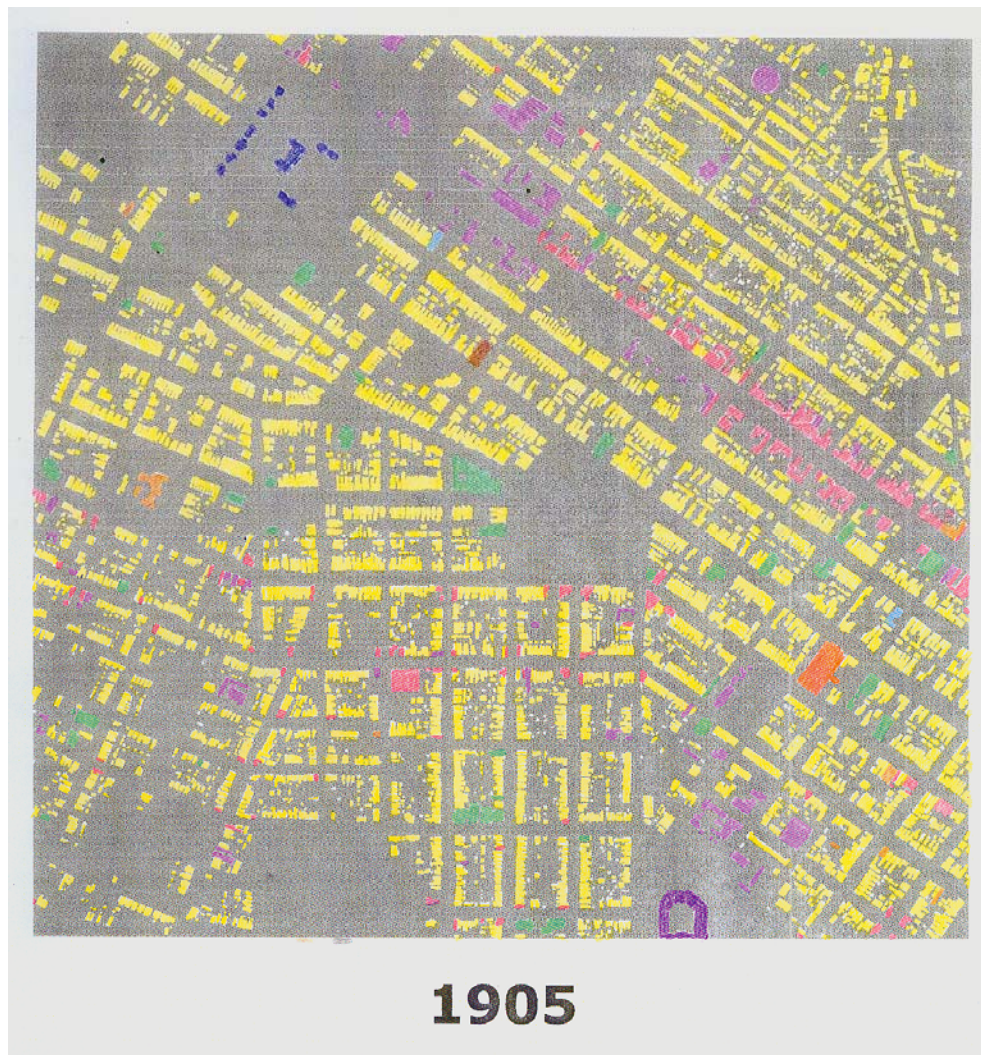
Plan for Monroe Park. The variety of spaces seen in the earlier design investigations have become more concentrated in the reorganized structure of the park.















Heavily landscaped courtyards and open lawn areas throughout the VCU campus have significantly increased the amount of green space in the area surrounding Monroe Park.

CHAPTER 16: LAND USE STUDIES

Analysis of land use in 1905 and 2003 confirms the change in character of the area suggested in the figure-ground diagrams. The area surrounding the Park was overwhelmingly residential in 1905. On all sides the park is bordered by residential neighborhoods that stretch to the edges of the square mile study area. Monroe Park's character provides a good fit with its role as a neighborhood park. It is easy to imagine the park acting as a defining aspect for the neighborhoods bordering the park, and serving as a point of connection among them. In 2003, the area, and the park's relationship with its surroundings, proves far more difficult to define. In addition to the obvious variety of use, the area lacks the balance seen in the 1905 diagram. The strong presence of Virginia Commonwealth University stands out, as does the residential Fan District beyond it. However, the areas to the North, South, and East of the park appear lacking in depth, presence, and unifying qualities.



LEGEND

 Single Family Residential	 University
 Multi-Family Residential	 Hotel
 Apartment Residential	 Public Infrastructure
 Retail	 Parking Structures
 Office	 Industrial
 Civic	 Vacant

Closer study of the current character of the area reveals a new pattern of potential relationships between the park and its surroundings. The VCU campus stands out as the single most dominant feature in the area. The university's presence in the area will increase with the addition of the proposed business school campus (see diagram bottom left). The presence of the engineering school and new business school at the southeast corner of the park, several dormitory buildings at the southwest and northwest corners of the park, and the convergence of the east-west streets running through the main academic campus at the park present the potential for a strong relationship between Monroe Park and the university. VCU recently recognized these ties, renaming the academic campus the Monroe Park Campus.

The location of the Landmark theater, two churches, and the residential Fan District, in addition to the VCU campus, to the west of the park places a strong emphasis on the park's relationship to its surroundings along this edge of the park. In comparison, the connections along the remaining three edges of the park appear much weaker. VCU's presence along the north and south edges of the park is not as concentrated. The area to the south only reaches two blocks before being cut off by the Downtown Expressway. To the north, Broad Street acts as a border limiting the perceived relationships between the park and areas beyond this border. The eastern edge of the park has the most tenuous relationship to its surroundings. Belvidere Street acts as a border cutting off the park connections right at its edge. The ill defined character of the area beyond Belvidere Street, and its focus on connections to downtown Richmond, further weaken any ties to Monroe Park. Current circumstances, when contrasted with conditions in 1905, show quite clearly that, while the design of Monroe Park has remained constant, the relationships that made this design work no longer exist.



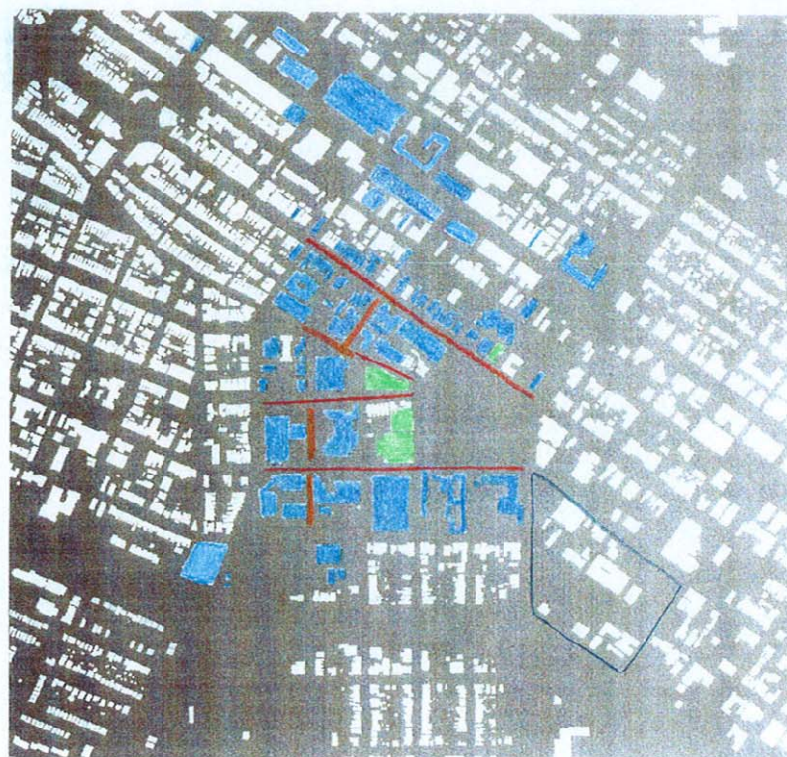
Looking west from the park at Sacred Heart Cathedral and VCU beyond.



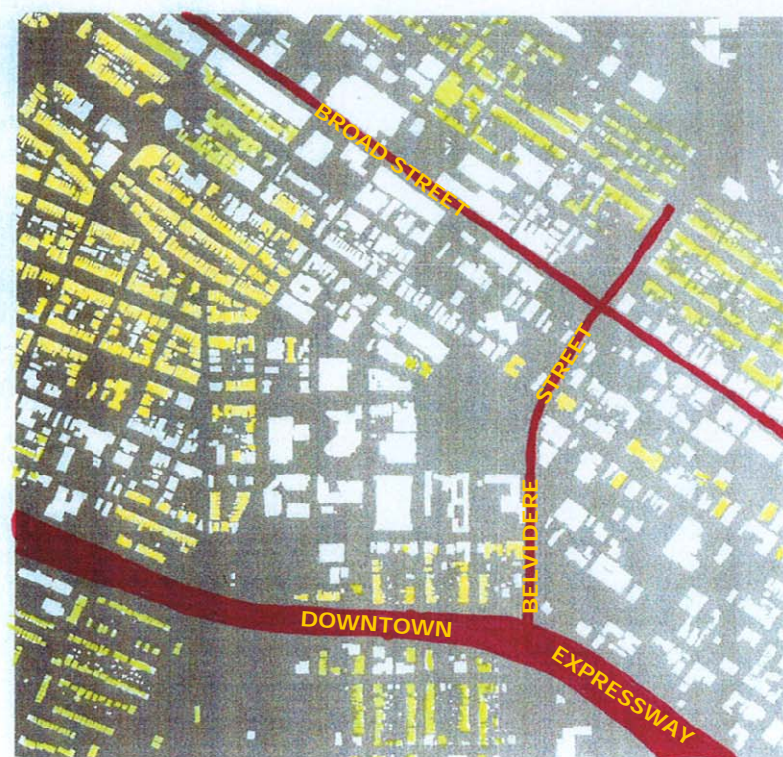
Looking south across the Downtown Expressway at Oregon Hill.



Looking toward Monroe Park from the east.



While existing VCU buildings, shown in blue, and proposed additions to the campus, circled in blue, surround Monroe Park, the connecting routes through campus, shown in red, suggest a stronger relationship between the park and campus along the park's western edge. The presence of several civic buildings, shown in green, provide additional emphasis along this edge of the park.



Broad Street, Belvidere Street, and, to a greater extent, the Downtown Expressway create boundaries that diminish the depth of Monroe Park's connections to the areas north, east, and south of the park. The continued presence of significant residential areas, particularly to the west of the park, suggests a supply of potential users for Monroe Park.

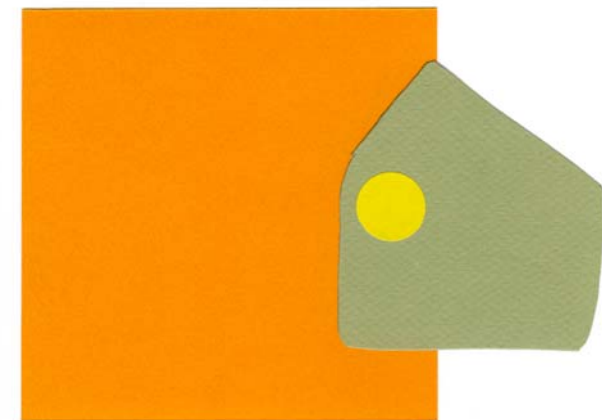
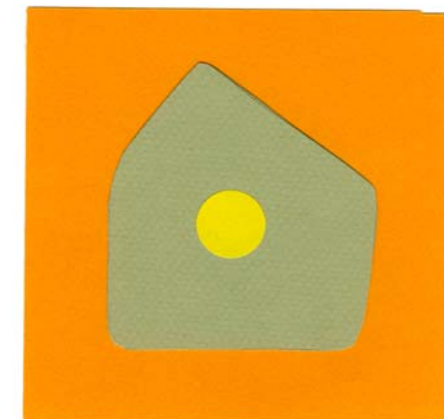
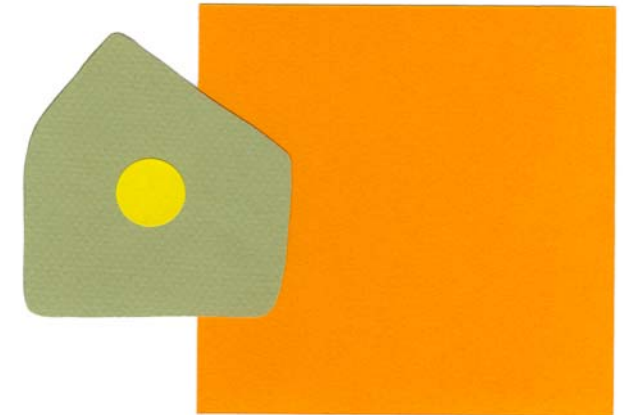
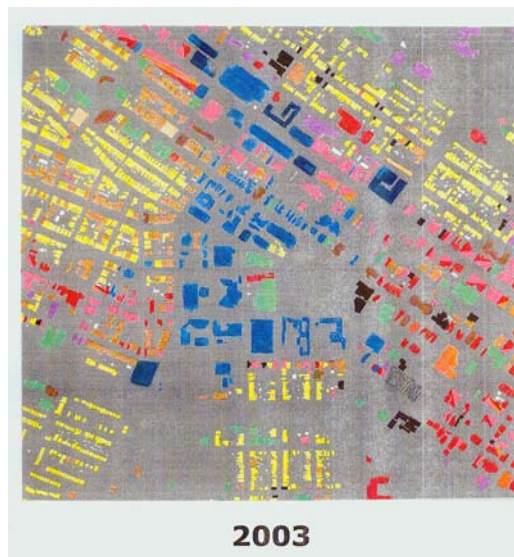
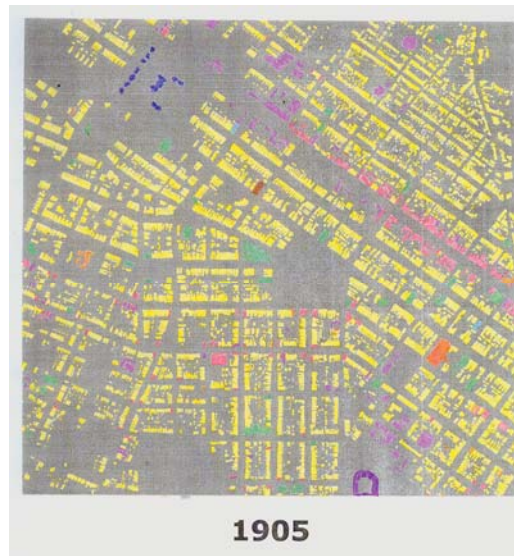
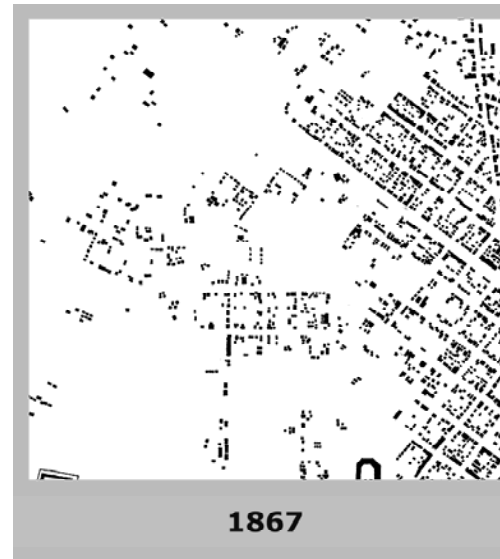
CHAPTER 17: DESIGN THOUGHTS, PART III

The analysis of the square mile surrounding Monroe Park shows a process of development which has altered the relationship between the park and its surroundings. Monroe Park finds itself at the center of a composition in 2003 far different from the composition which lent itself to the park's "golden era" during the early 1900's. Like Dewey's living organism, the unchanging form of the park has fallen "out of step with the march of surrounding things." Understanding of the changes which brought about this situation provides the means of beginning the process of recovering unison with its surroundings

In the early 1870's, as the park began to take form, Monroe Park stood at the western edge of Richmond. The park's relationships were oriented to the east. However, the desire for the park to act as a catalyst for growth in the area located the perceived center of the park at the physical center.

By 1905, the area around Monroe Park had filled in with residential neighborhoods. The park's relationships to its surroundings were balanced around the perimeter of the park. Again, the perceived center of the park fell at the physical center. The uniform urban fabric supported the design of the park, creating a composition that led to Monroe Park's success.

In 2003, Monroe Park's strongest relationships have shifted to the area west of the park. The perceived center of the park has followed this shift to the western edge of the park. However, the design of Monroe Park continues to be centered on the physical center of the park, creating incongruities in the composition of the area. By addressing the new perceived center in the design, the park begins to make sense within the composition of its surroundings and new relationships begin to take shape.

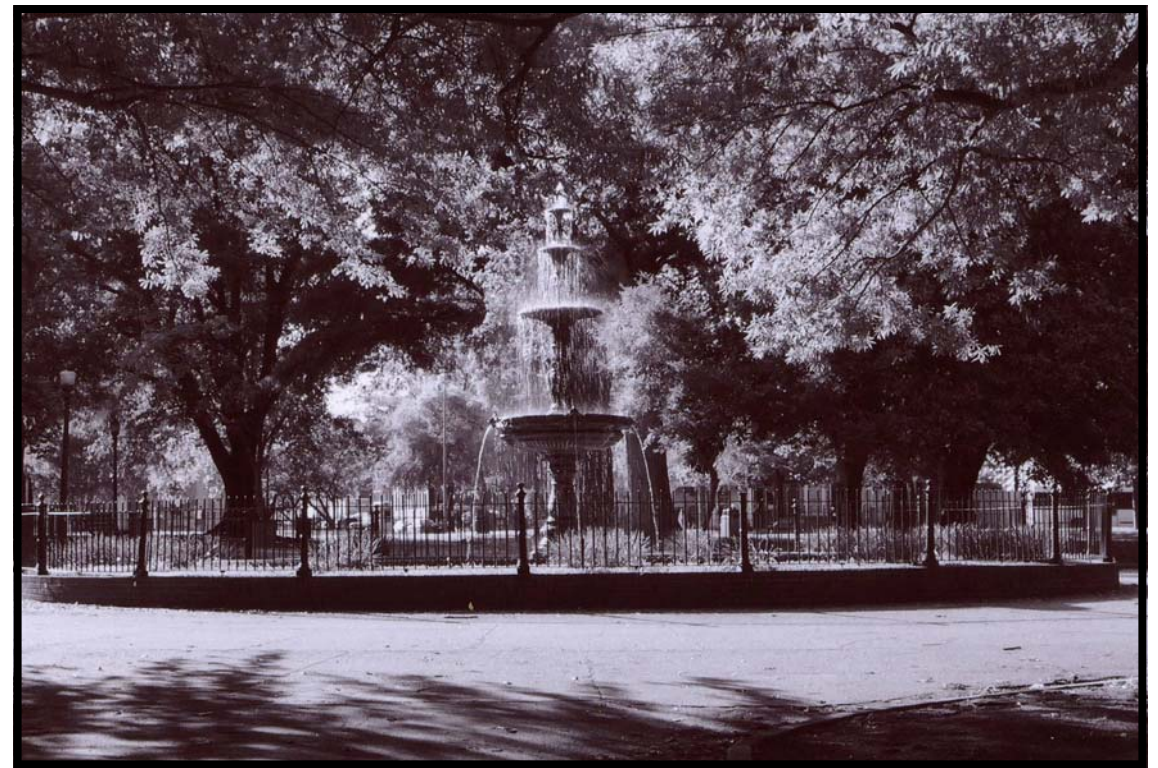


Study showing the evolution of Monroe Park's relationship to its surroundings.



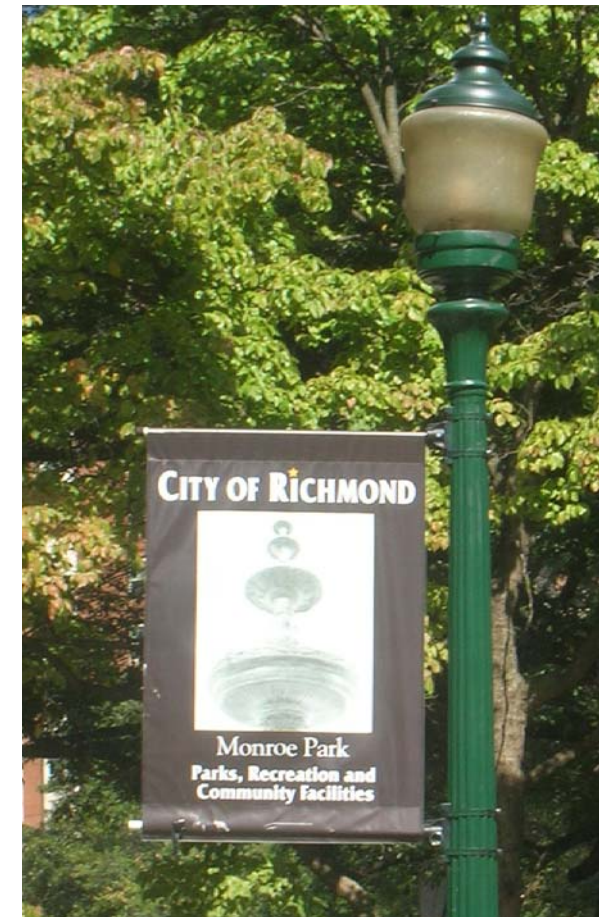
Above, sign marking the edge of VCU's Monroe Park Campus.
 Right, the fountain at the center of activity during the Monument Avenue 10k race.

The fountain, which has resided at the center of the park for much of its history, stands out as the most widely recognized symbol of Monroe Park, with the possible exception of the parks outline and path structure. Moving the fountain to the western edge of the park presents a clear statement about the shift of the perceived center of the park. More importantly, it provides a source of continuity with the old design, as the new design for Monroe Park continues to center on the fountain.



Above, the four-tiered cast iron fountain has been a fixture in the park since the early 1900's.

Right, Monroe Park banner



The newfound understanding of the shift in the perceived center of the park led the design in a new direction at this point in the process. The plaza was moved to the western edge of the park, aligning the strongest element in the design with the park's strongest point of connection to its surroundings. The plaza began to take on a role as a forecourt to the numerous prominent buildings, shown below, along this edge of the park. The primary path aligned with the section of Main Street coming from Downtown Richmond provides a connection to the Engineering School and the proposed Business School. A garden strip buffers the park from the busy traffic along Belvidere Street, and provides a sharp transition from the area beyond Belvidere to the east. The combination of lawn and trees, carried forward from the previous design, presents a familiar relationship between the park and the older buildings to the north. Along the southern edge of the park this combination compliments the more heavily landscaped fronts of the Engineering School and Residence hall. Within the park, the contrast between the lawn area and the plaza creates a dialogue between aspects of change and continuity. This theme is continued in the use of existing paths, and the suggestion of the old center, contrasted with the new routes through the park created by the broad primary path and plaza. The combination of old and new in the park allows for easy recognition of the old structure of the park and its relationship to the new design, providing aspects of both change and continuity.



Landscaping along the front of the VCU Engineering School.



The Prestwold and Lindsey House located on the northern edge of the park.



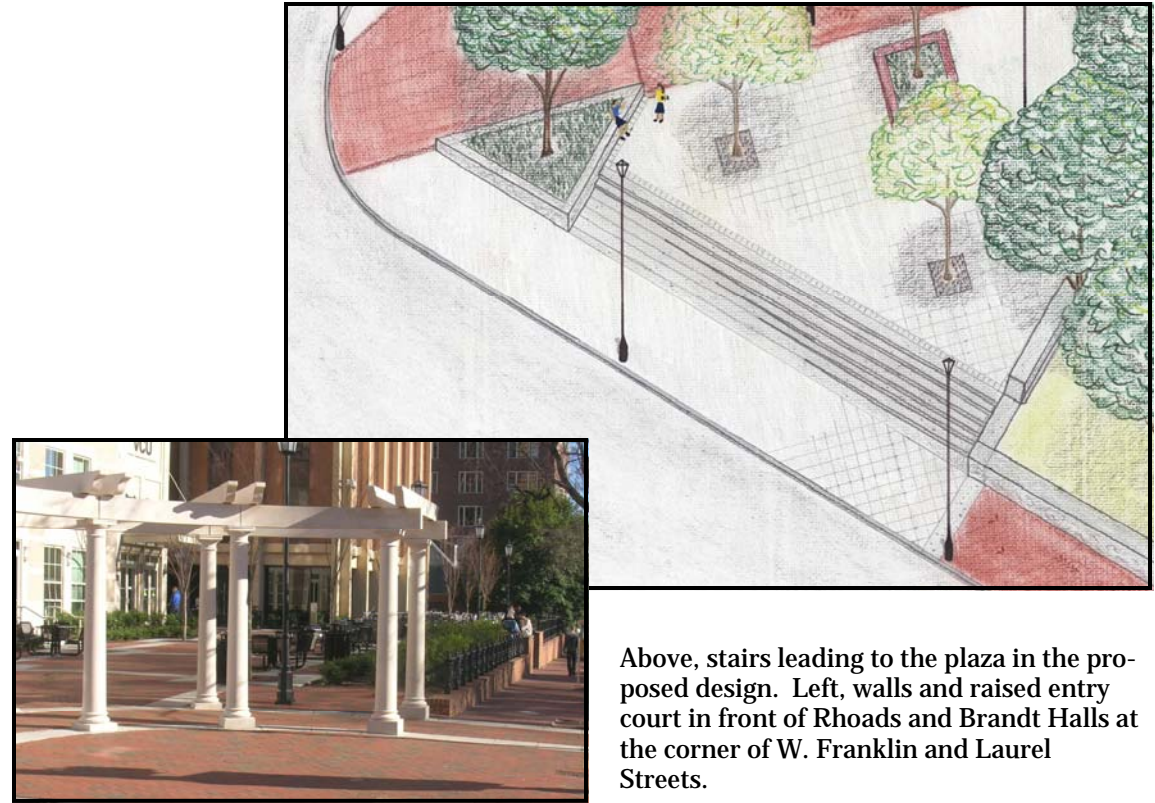
Buildings along the western edge of Monroe park. The major buildings are from left : The Landmark Theater, Grace and Holy Trinity Church, Sacred Heart Cathedral, and VCU's Johnson Hall.



Model of existing topography in Monroe Park.

Moving the plaza to the western edge of the park presented an opportunity to take advantage of the natural slope of the park from west to east. The creation of a relatively flat plaza along the high side of the park raised grades along the inner edge of the plaza. A series of terraced lawns connecting the plaza to the central lawn area provides a gradual transition between the two elements. The change in grade provides additional emphasis to the plaza, further strengthening this element in the design. The at grade relationship to the buildings across Laurel Street aids in promoting the seamless relationship to the area west of the park. The difference in grade between the plaza and Main Street and Franklin Street as they fall away to the east, and the manipulation of elements to connect them at the sidewalk, mirror the relationship of the surrounding architecture to these streets.

Right, model of proposed grading for Monroe Park. Subtle manipulation of the topography helps emphasize transitions and create stronger connections to surroundings.



Above, stairs leading to the plaza in the proposed design. Left, walls and raised entry court in front of Rhoads and Brandt Halls at the corner of W. Franklin and Laurel Streets.



CHAPTER 18: PHYSICAL CONNECTIONS

The addition of the plaza and other hardscape elements presented an opportunity to connect the design for the park to its surroundings at a detail scale. Exploration of the area surrounding Monroe Park revealed forms and materials that held the potential for connecting the park to fragments of the past as well as elements representative of newer construction. Granite walls and steps are prevalent along the historic section of W. Franklin Street. Brick sidewalks and granite curbs are scattered throughout the area. Granite cobble can be found in numerous alleys. The connection between these materials and the past character of the area presents possible sources of continuity for Monroe Park. The geometric patterns typical of hardscaped surfaces on the VCU campus presents a means of reinforcing the connection between the park and the university.



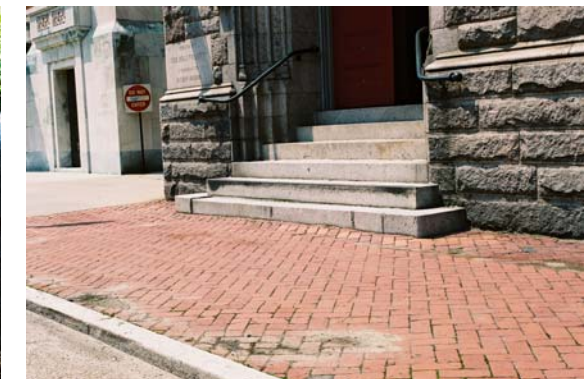
Plaza adjacent to VCU Student Commons.



Sidewalk in front of Landmark Theater.



Pedestrian walkway through VCU campus.



The use of granite, finished in a variety of ways, for low walls, steps, and curbs is characteristic of the older areas surrounding the park.



Brick and cobblestone paving shows up throughout the surrounding area.

PART THREE: DESIGN RESPONSE VISIONS FOR A NEW MONROE PARK



Art celebrates with peculiar intensity the moments in which the past reinforces the present, and in which the future is a quickening of what is now.

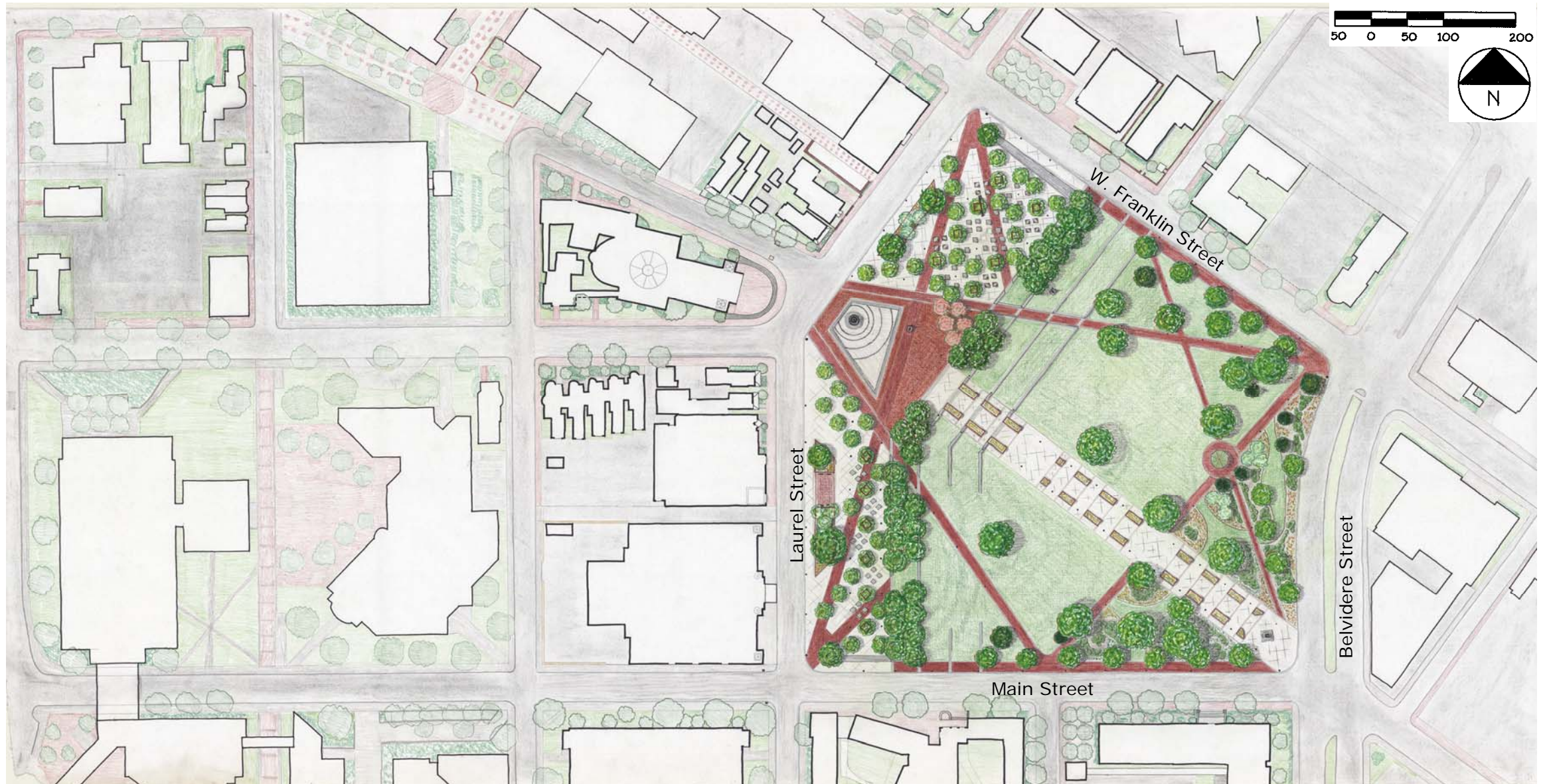
-John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (539)

CHAPTER 19: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY, A DESIGN NARRATIVE

The proposed design for Monroe Park translates the discoveries made over the course of the exploration of the park's past, and its present circumstances, into a new version of the park shaped both by the legacy of the past and the reality of the present. An enhanced understanding of the way the park's design related to its surroundings during its earlier period of success revealed how changes to the surrounding area have affected the park. The new design for Monroe Park seeks to recreate these relationships, acknowledging, and ultimately engaging, its present surroundings. Understanding the changes in the area, and the more subtle changes within the park, also clarified initial impressions of the park. Connecting these initial impressions to this larger context changed the way the problems and sources of potential connected to the park were perceived, providing direction for

the new design. While research and direct observation suggested the need for change, they also suggested possibilities for continuity, providing depth to the design and making sense of the proposed changes. Elements of the existing park are preserved and incorporated into the new design, revealing layers of the park's development. Ultimately, the proposed design for Monroe Park blends old and new elements into a single composition, revealing how change and continuity can compliment each other in shaping the urban landscape.

The shift in the perceived center of Monroe Park played the most important role in shaping the design. Understanding how the existing radial design of the park made sense within the context of the surrounding area at the height of its success,



and the discovery of how dramatically this relationship had eroded over time, gave new direction to the design. Drawing on lessons from the past, the creation of a new center emphasizes a new relationship between the park and its present surroundings. The major new elements emphasize the new center and address important relationships to surrounding areas, expressing a purpose to the changes made in the new design. The relocation of the 4-tiered cast iron fountain from the middle of the park to the new center capitalizes on its historic role as the central element of Monroe Park. This gesture reflects a desire, characteristic of the proposed design, to give new life to elements of the existing park, rather than abandoning them in favor of new constructions.

The new focus of Monroe Park's design addresses initial impressions regarding the park's lack of connection to its surroundings. Initial impressions of the park continually shaped, and in turn were shaped by, understandings gained during the research process. Efforts to address problems and capitalize on sources of potential identified at the beginning of this project provided direction for the design response to these discoveries. The open character of the park during its most successful period compared to the dark and unwelcoming feel created by the overcrowding of trees and low hanging canopy revealed changes within the park obscured by the continuity of form throughout the park's history. The proposed design opens up Monroe Park. Thinning the stands of trees opens up new sightlines in to, out of, and through the park. The improved sightlines create the opportunity to take in larger sections of the diverse collection of buildings surrounding the park, allowing these buildings to tell one story about the change and continuity which have shaped the area. More distant views help place the park in the context of the city. Within Monroe Park, the open character provides a stronger definition of the individual elements which make up the whole, an aspect which had been lacking in the existing park. The homogeneity of the previous design, which made sense in earlier periods, is replaced by a variety of spaces. The different sections of the plaza, broad walkway, terraces, lawn, and gardens which make up the proposed design provide a composition more in tune with current surroundings and more capable of accommodating a wider variety of uses. The various spaces also suggest the varying relationships between the park and its surroundings. Unlike the existing design, with its haphazard arrangement of elements, the elements in the proposed design have strong relationships to each other. Existing paths define the edge of the garden area. Individual trees break up the vast expanse of the more dominant lawn area. The terraces provide a gradual transition to the plaza. Overall, the park's improved ability to engage its surroundings combined with the variety of spaces, definition of individual elements, and connection of these elements into a unified design give Monroe Park a stronger presence.

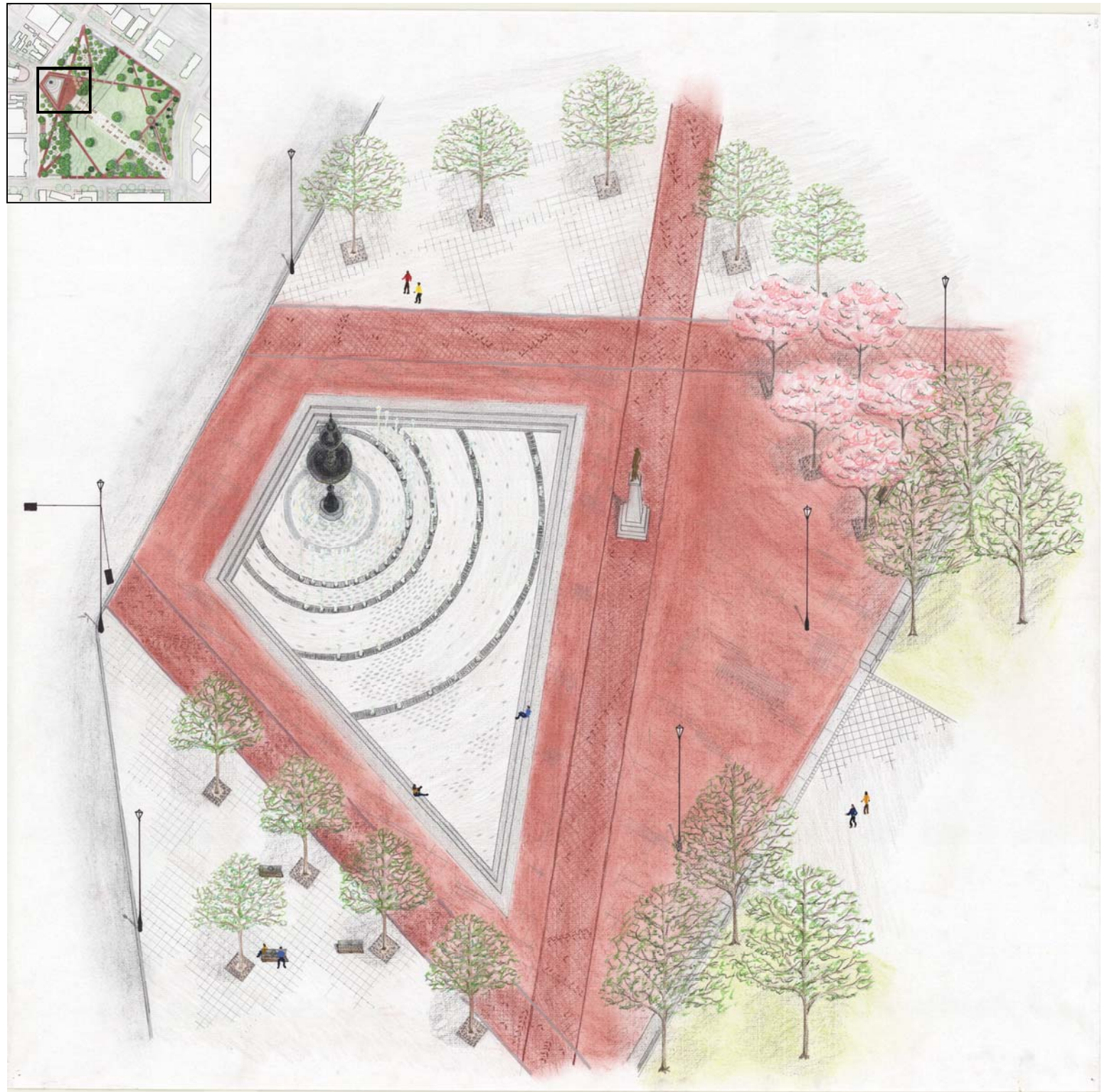
The design for Monroe Park proposes numerous changes seeking to provide a form that is relevant to current circumstances. However, the existing design of the park continues to play an important role in the new version of Monroe Park. Elements of the old park are incorporated into the proposed design, giving new life to existing elements as they relate to the changed context. At the same time, recognition of existing elements influenced the form of the proposed design. The survival of some aspects of the existing park, and the abandonment of others, reflects the continued relevance of those aspects preserved, maintaining the focus of the proposed design on the living present. With the exception of the fountain, the elements preserved from the old park remain in their original locations. This aspect of the design creates the impression of layers, with the new design laid over the old in such a way that only fragments of the old design remain visible. The contrast between these fragments, recognizable as part of the old design, and the new elements in the park provides evidence of the change that constitutes the new design. In the short term, the incorporation of these familiar aspects into the new design promotes understanding of this change, providing evidence of how the change makes sense in the overall process of development. In the long term, the contrast between elements from different periods, and the new relationships forged between them, provides depth to the design, adding a new chapter in the story of Monroe Park.



CHAPTER 20: FOUNTAIN PLAZA

The central section of the plaza presents a clear example of how existing elements and materials are incorporated into new constructions. The historic 4-tiered cast iron fountain, relocated to the plaza from its position at the center of the existing radial design, becomes part of an expanded concept of the fountain in the proposed design. The small pool surrounding the existing fountain is replaced in the new design by a larger sunken dry basin surrounded by steps. A series of water jets arranged in concentric circles around the old fountain provide additional emphasis and variety, giving the fountain a greater presence in the design of the park. The relocation of the fountain to the plaza draws on the historic role of the fountain as the central element of the park to suggest the shift in the perceived center of Monroe Park. The new concept for the fountain transforms the existing fountain from something to be viewed into an element to be experienced.

While the plaza represents one of the most significant changes in the new version of Monroe Park, existing elements play a significant role in its design. The central section of the plaza connected to the fountain is defined by two existing paths. A simple offset from these paths, and a third existing path running through the plaza, gives the fountain basin its shape. The monument to Confederate General Williams Wickham, preserved in its original location, looks out over the new fountain, seeming to be surveying its new surroundings. The preserved paths, the monument, and the fountain remain easily recognizable as aspects of the existing park, highlighting the changes in the new version of the park. However, the incorporation of these elements into the proposed design makes them equally recognizable as part of the new Monroe Park.



Axonometric drawing of the central fountain plaza. The openness of the plaza, and the brick paving, serve to set this area apart from the other new landscaped areas. The primary elements and structure of this area provide a strong example of how old and new can be combined to create designs which are both innovative and firmly connected to what came before.

CHAPTER 21: LAUREL STREET PLAZA

The plaza represents the most dramatic change to Monroe Park, giving the park a presence which was lacking in the existing design. The addition of the hardscaped plaza provides a new dimension to the existing concept of the park as greenspace. The modern design of the plaza, based on a geometric grid, creates an additional layer of contrast to the nineteenth century character of the existing park. Two foot square concrete pavers, laid at a 45 degree angle to the adjacent streets, create a grid in the floor of the plaza. This pattern draws on the variety of grid patterns used in walkways throughout the VCU campus, tying the park into the context of the university which increasingly dominates the area. The remaining elements of the design, with some notable exceptions, are arranged in direct relation to the grid. Six foot square granite blocks arranged in groups, granite tables with wood benches, and raised brick planters provide ample seating within the plaza. Numerous trees located in the plaza and along the adjacent terrace acknowledge the need for shade in the hot climate of Richmond, and create a connection to the predominantly green remainder of the park. The relationship of seating elements and trees creates more intimate pockets within the broad expanse of the plaza. The sculptural quality of the seating elements, and the repetition of their relationships to each other and to the tree plantings, creates a sense of rhythm, drawing attention to the fountain at the new center of Monroe Park. The contrasting mortared brick floor of the plaza surrounding the fountain emphasizes the center, providing a sense of arrival. In addition, the contrasting floor in the center section of the plaza facilitates the transition from one grid to the other, just as Monroe Park facilitates the transition of the street grid.

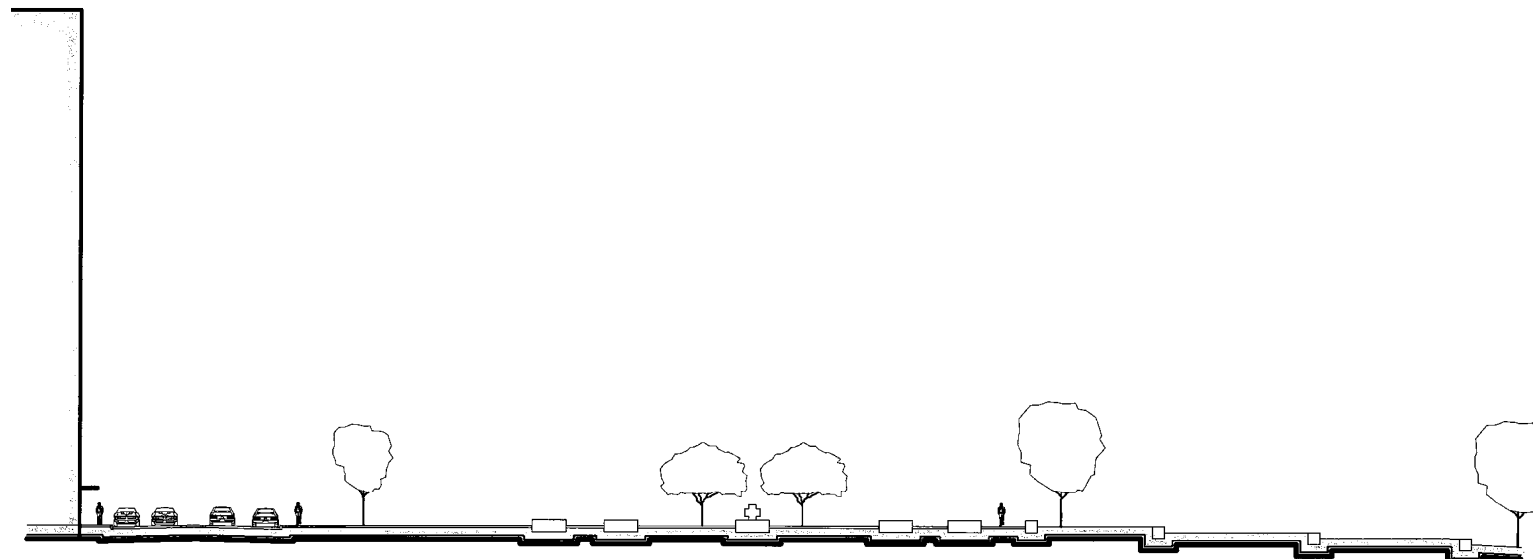
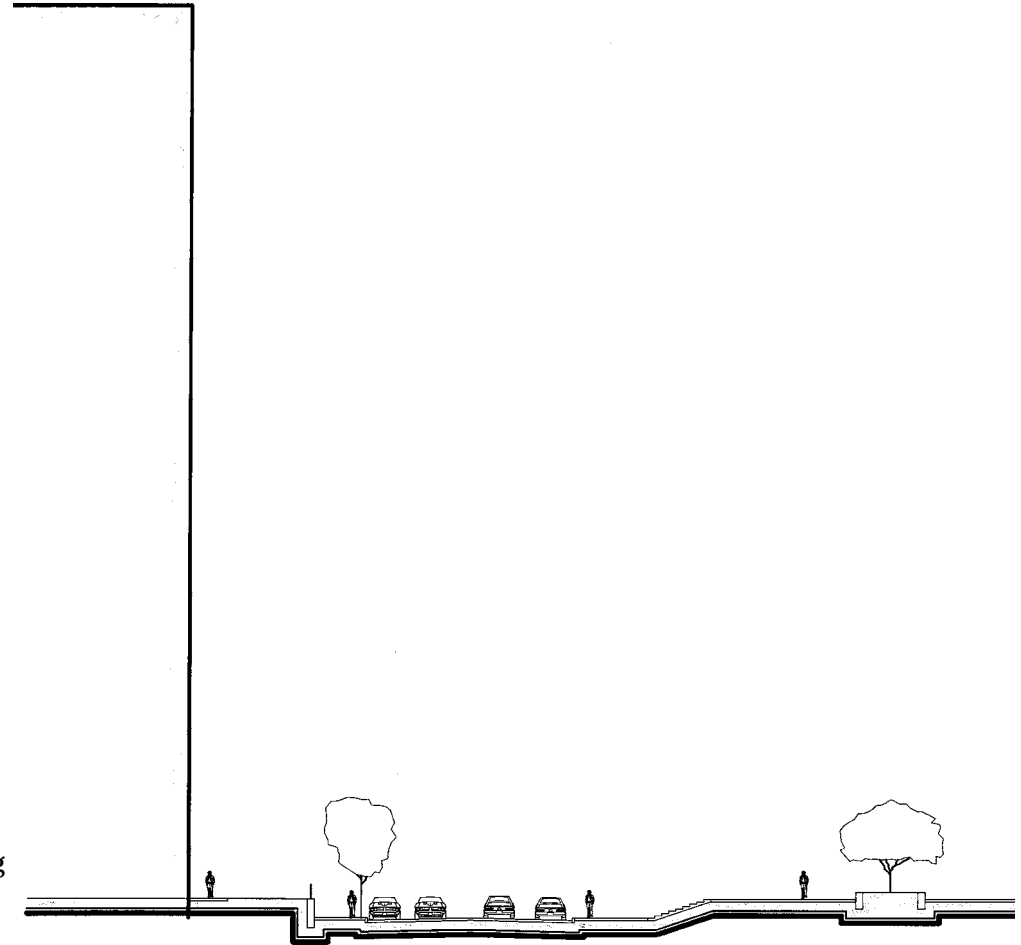


Axonometric drawing of the southern section of the Laurel Street plaza. The repetition of elements and grid pattern of the plaza floor introduce a sense of order that provides a strong contrast to the more natural arrangement of the lawn and garden areas below. The scale of the plaza as a whole holds the potential for hosting large scale events, while pockets created by the repetition of elements create more intimate spaces for day to day activities.

One of the major goals of the design was to foster stronger relationships between the park and its surroundings, establishing Monroe Park's place in its present context. The plaza plays a major role in achieving this goal. The strength of the plaza in the composition of the park emphasizes the western edge of the park, reflecting the importance of reaching out to the area in this direction as a source of support for the park. In a more physical sense, the geometric design and hardscaped surface of the plaza compliment the character of the areas along its edges, providing a more subtle transition from city to park. The sharper transition to the green areas of the park is moved inside the park, contributing to the perception of the plaza as a broad edge. While the surfaces and design of the plaza relate more closely with areas outside the park, the numerous tree plantings throughout the plaza and garden areas along Laurel Street connect the plaza to the predominantly green remainder of the park. The similar relationship between hardscaped and green areas found throughout the VCU campus provides a more seamless character to the area. While the plaza serves to strengthen the presence of Monroe Park, it also promotes a sense of belonging within the larger context of the area.



Section A-A from Rhoads Hall across W. Franklin Street to the Laurel Street Plaza. The raised plaza mirrors the raised entry courtyard to Rhoads Hall creating a stronger connection across W. Franklin Street.



Section B-B running from Johnson Hall across Laurel Street to the Laurel Street plaza. The at grade relationship of the plaza to Laurel Street mirrors the relationship of the buildings across the street. The plaza and terraces create a broader edge to the park, moving the transition to the park's greenspace to the interior of Monroe Park.

The central section of the plaza provided an example of how old and new elements in the design complimented each other. In the outer sections of the plaza, the preserved paths contrast sharply with the new design, interrupting the dominant grid. The preserved paths, reduced to mere pattern in the plaza, present a reminder of the old park. The two fragments that once ran from the corners of Laurel Street to the center of the park provide the only suggestion of the former focus of the park's design. The path running across the plaza, connecting the corners of Laurel Street, highlights the shift in the grid and helps connect the different sections of the plaza. The continued relevance of this latter path, heavily traveled in the existing design due to its connection to dormitory buildings at either end, contrasts sharply with the two fragments which have been stripped of purpose by the shift in the center of the design. This contrast highlights the departure from the existing design in terms of form and focus. Two monuments are retained in their original locations in the design of the plaza, with a third located on one of the terraces below. These monuments are thoroughly incorporated into the design, giving them a sense of belonging. However, the uniqueness of these elements amidst the repeated elements of the plaza sets them apart, clearly defining their connection to another time.



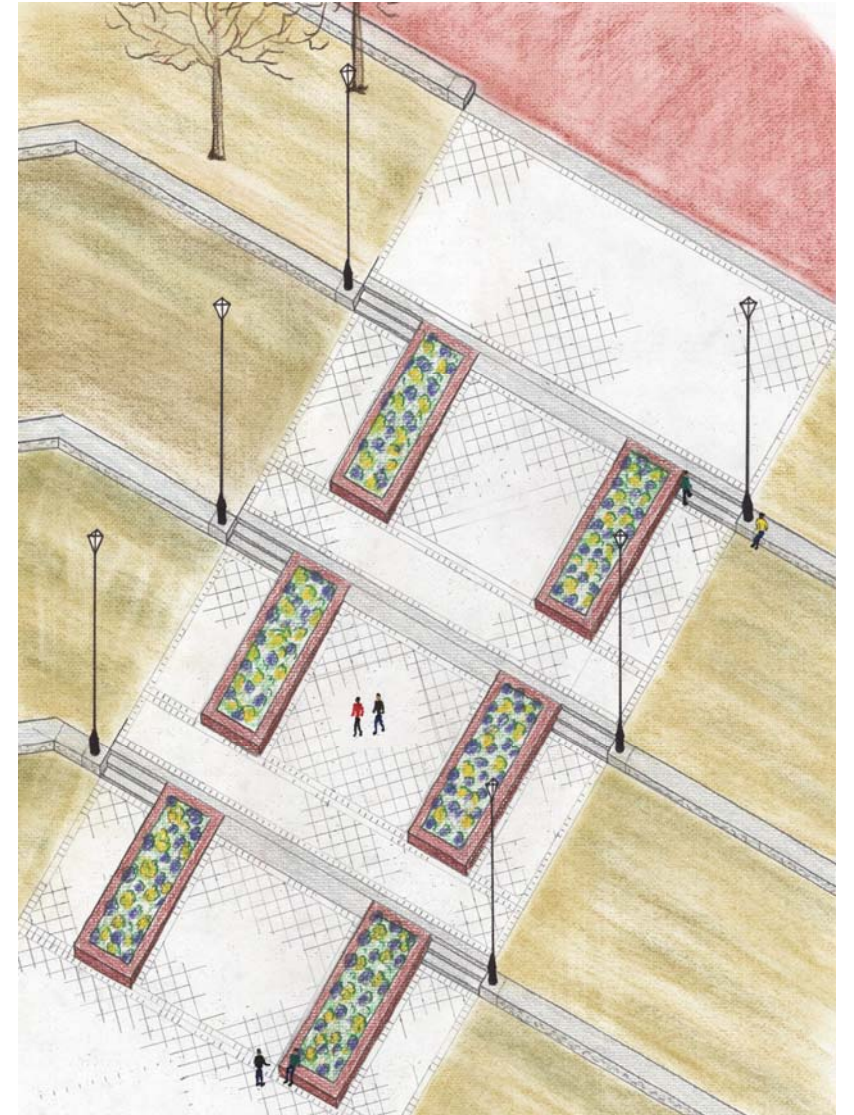
The location of the Joseph Bryan monument in the middle of an open terrace in the proposed design provides greater emphasis to the monument than its current surroundings.



Axonometric drawing of the northern section of the Laurel Street plaza. The contrast between the fragments of existing paths and the grid of the new plaza highlights the changes which constitute the new design for Monroe Park. The preservation of existing paths and monuments in their original locations promotes an understanding of the layers of old and new that make up the proposed design.

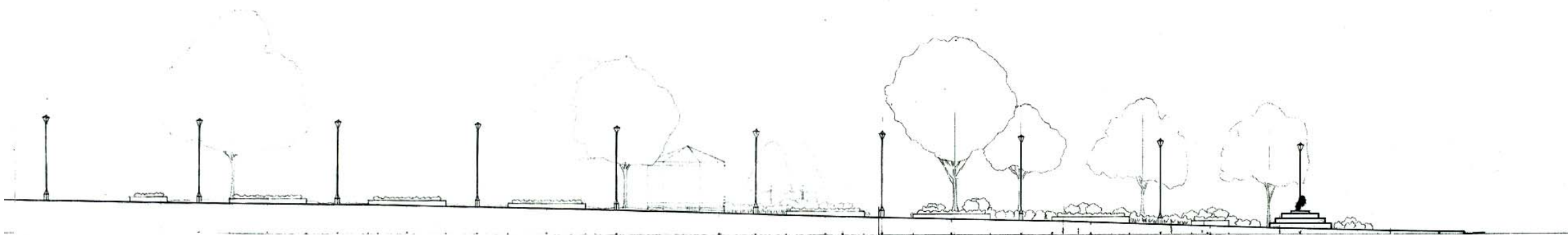
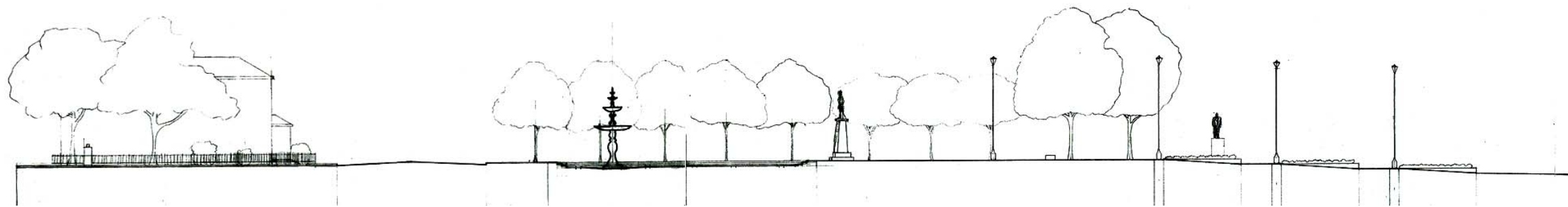
CHAPTER 22: CENTRAL WALK

The new broad walkway running from the plaza to the corner of Main Street and Belvidere Street carries the idea of the plaza through the park. Set amidst the expanse of lawn, the strength of the walkway in the design emphasizes the new center of the park, drawing attention to the plaza above. The link provided by the walkway to the corner of Main Street and Belvidere Street, the location of VCU's Engineering School and proposed Business School, suggests the possible future role of the park as a connecting element for the university. The walkway's design and materials clearly connect it to the plaza, defining it as part of the new vision for Monroe Park. Raised brick planters provide seating which, combined with the width of the walkway, create an opportunity for the walkway to act as an elongated plaza. From the lawn, a series of steps and ramps, separated by raised planters, climb up through the terraces, creating a grand entrance to the plaza. The use of steps along the outside of the walkway allows the terraced lawns to meet the walkway without having to accommodate the central ramps. From the plaza, sight-lines from the walkway create the opportunity to take in the expanse of the park, as well as providing distant views to the skyline of Downtown Richmond. A statue of a ram, VCU's mascot, helps anchor down the far end of the walkway, providing emphasis to this entrance to the park and recalling the monuments which have played a role in the character of the park throughout its history. Traveling from downtown on Main Street, this new statue announces arrival at the Monroe Park Campus.



Axonometric drawing of the upper section of the central walk. Raised planters divide the broad expanse of the walk. The central section is ramped, while the outer sections employ stairs allowing for a smooth transition to the terraced lawns.

Axonometric drawing of the lower section of the central walk. The new sculpture of a ram, VCU's mascot, suggests the strong relationship between the park and the university.



Section-elevation running through Monroe Park along the centerline of the central walk. The central walk carries the idea of the new plaza through the park, helping connect the various spaces created in the new design. The central walk drops down through the terraced lawns from the plaza to the main lawn. At the far end of the main lawn, the central walk is surrounded by gardens as it approaches the corner of Main Street and Belvidere Street.



The alignment of the central walk with Main Street coming from Downtown Richmond frames a view of the Richmond skyline, providing a sense of orientation within the larger context of the city. The central walk will also help tie the new VCU Business School, seen here under construction, to the Monroe Park Campus.



The central walk carries the theme of streets converted to pedestrian walks seen throughout the VCU campus into Monroe Park.



Between classes on the VCU campus. The central walk has the potential to become an integral part of the circulation pattern of the campus as VCU continues to expand.

CHAPTER 23: THE LAWN AND BELVIDERE STREET GARDENS

The remaining sections of the park employ elements more familiar to the existing park. Lawn and trees characteristic of the existing park continue to define the middle section of the park. With the exception of the new broad walkway, existing paths are employed to accommodate circulation. Even the new garden area along Belvidere Street and the new gazebo draw on precedents from the park's past. The changes made in the proposed design reorganize existing elements, and introduce elements from the past, in an effort to address current circumstances and enhance the presence of the park. The removal of several paths and a number of trees creates a broader expanse of lawn, emphasizing this element and giving it a stronger presence in the design. The competition between lawn and trees in the existing design gives way to a more complimentary relationship of lawn punctuated by trees, strengthening the definition of the parts as well as the whole. The stronger edges to the lawn, provided by the plaza and terraces at one end and the garden at the other, provide greater definition. The garden area, defined by an existing path and the outer edge of the park, creates a broad edge to the park, buffering the lawn from the busy traffic along Belvidere Street. The new gazebo, located at the intersection of two existing paths at the edge of the garden, offers some interest to this underused end of the park. The location of the gazebo at the edge of the garden gives it a definite orientation toward the lawn and plaza beyond. The addition of the garden clearly marks the edge of the park, reflecting the weak relationship to the area east of Monroe Park. In comparison, garden's position adjacent to the Engineering School compliments the heavily landscaped front of this building. The familiar appearance of the lawn punctuated by trees, likewise, maintains the long-standing relationship between the older section of W. Franklin Street and the park. The design of the lawn and gardens provides a strong source of continuity, adapting familiar forms to meet new realities.



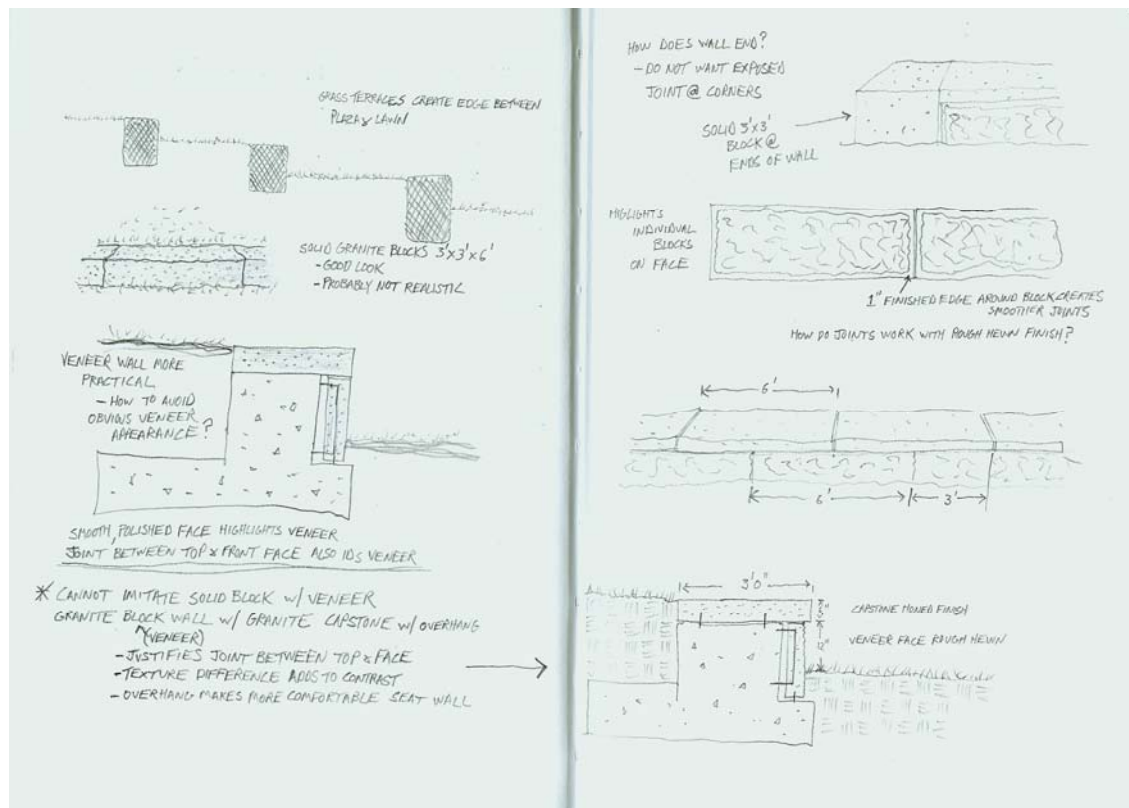
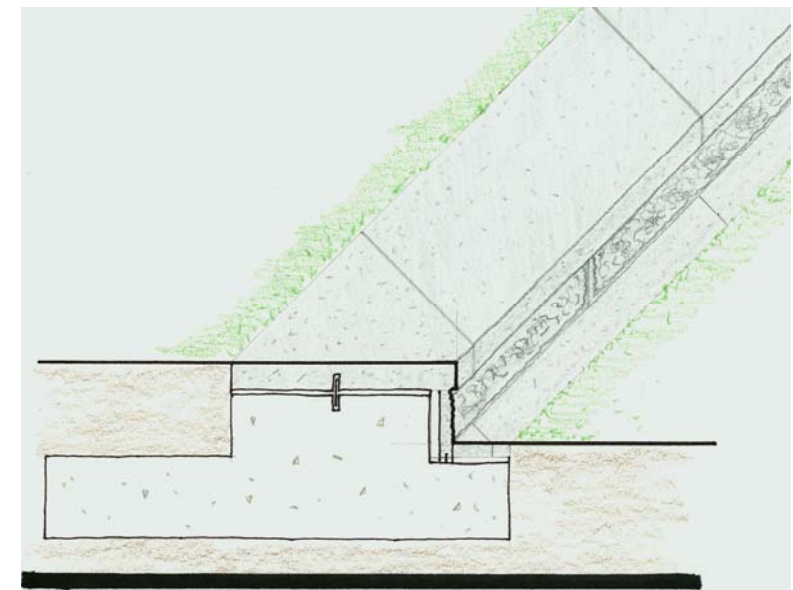
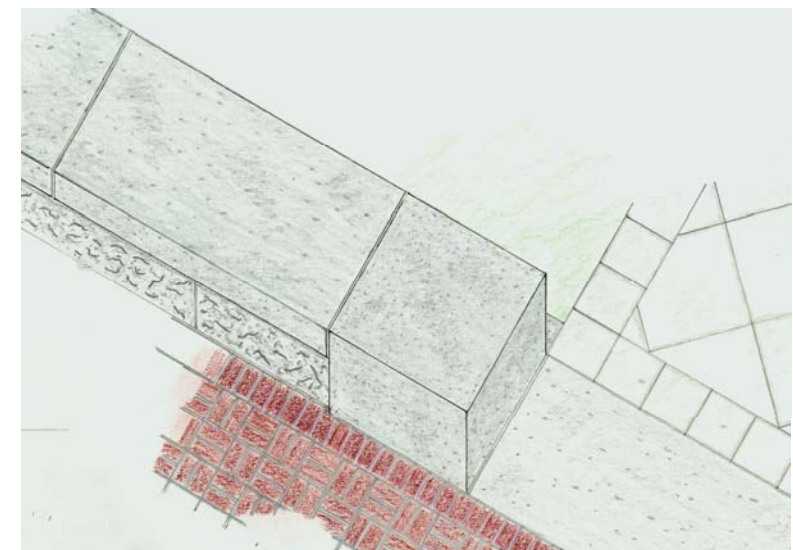
The proposed design provides a larger area of uninterrupted lawn suitable for more active recreation. A reduction in the number of trees returns the park to its former pattern of lawn punctuated by trees. The Belvidere Street gardens create a more satisfying edge to the park while providing a buffer between the park and the busy traffic along Belvidere Street.

CHAPTER 24: DETAILS

The selection of materials and detailing of elements played a critical role in making sense of new design ideas with regard to place. The prevalence of granite in the surrounding landscape and architecture was brought into the design of the park. In particular, The design drew on the unique assortment of granite walls that give the older section of W. Franklin Street its character. These walls provided the inspiration for the terrace walls, the seat wall at the edge of the plaza, and the granite seating blocks in the plaza.



The numerous granite walls along W. Franklin Street play a large part in creating the area's unique character. The variety of finishes and construction techniques used for these walls provided a valuable source of ideas for the design of Monroe Park.

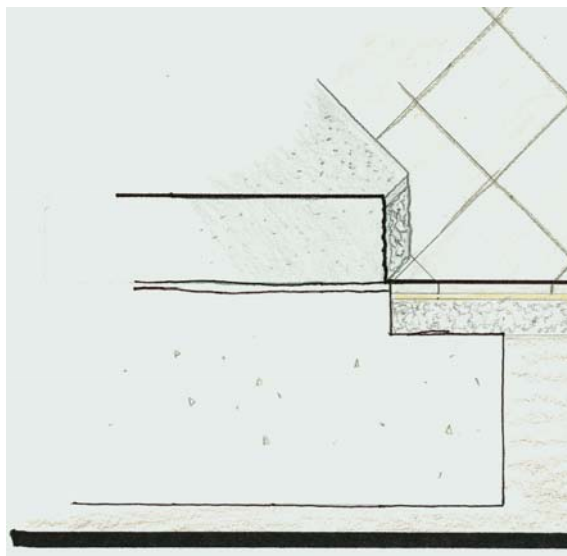
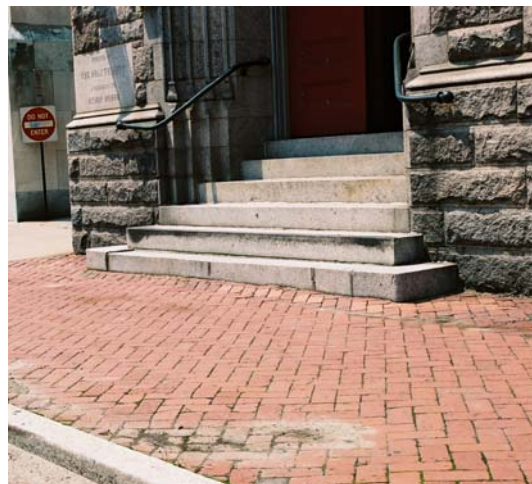


A series of studies for the terrace walls.

The seatwall at the edge of the plaza and the terrace walls employ a mix of rough hewn and honed finishes found in the existing walls along W. Franklin Street.

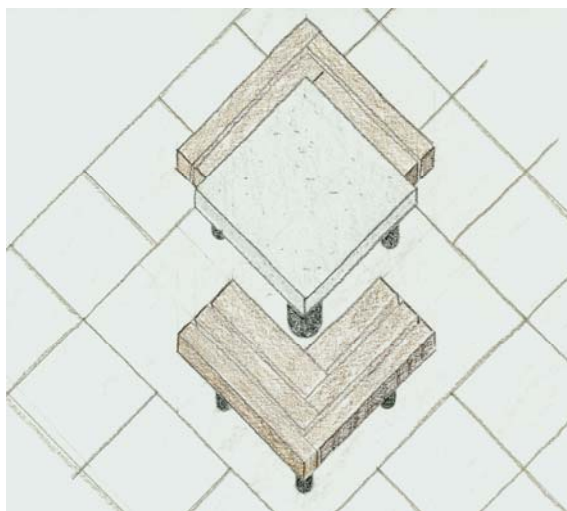


Below, granite steps outside Grace and Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. In addition to its use in walls, granite is a popular material for steps leading into the surrounding buildings. This trend is picked up in the steps surrounding the fountain, right, and the steps at the edges of the plaza, below right.

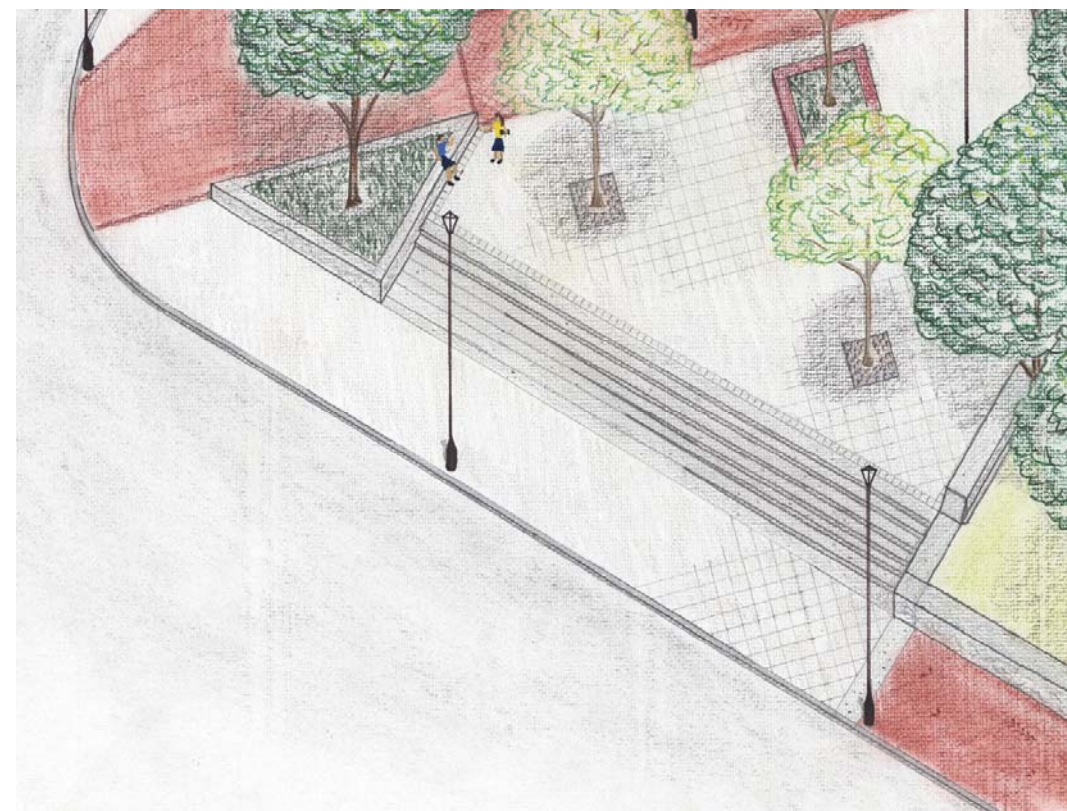


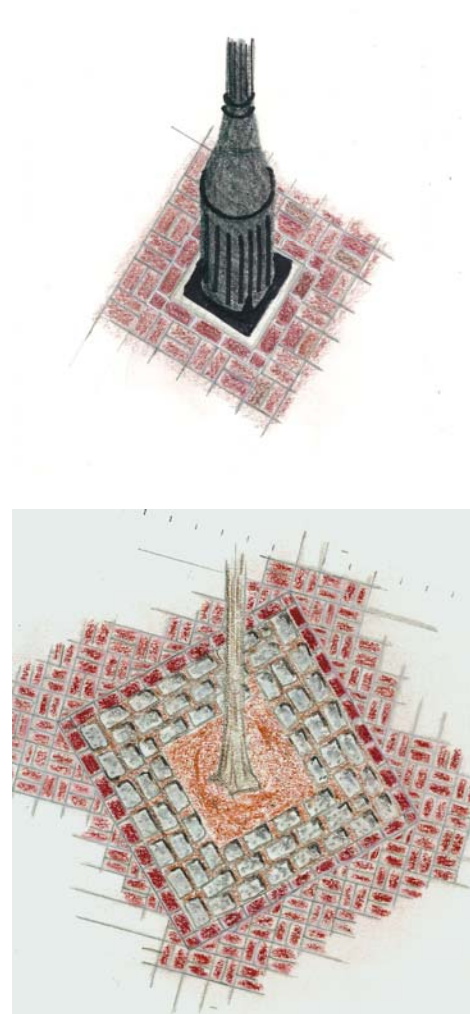
The rough hewn sides and honed top of several walls along W. Franklin Street, such as the one shown above, provided the inspiration for the finish on the granite seating blocks located in the plaza. Granite tables with wooden benches present a variation on the theme.

Detail of the Granite Seating Blocks.

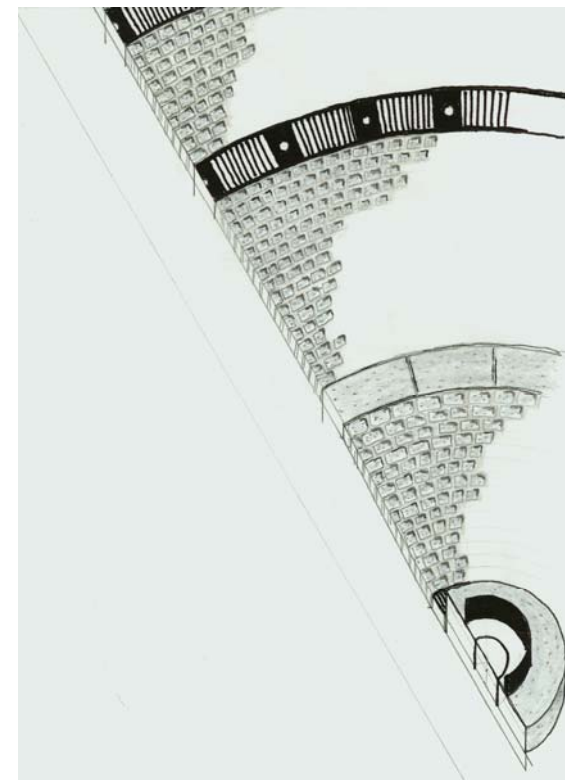
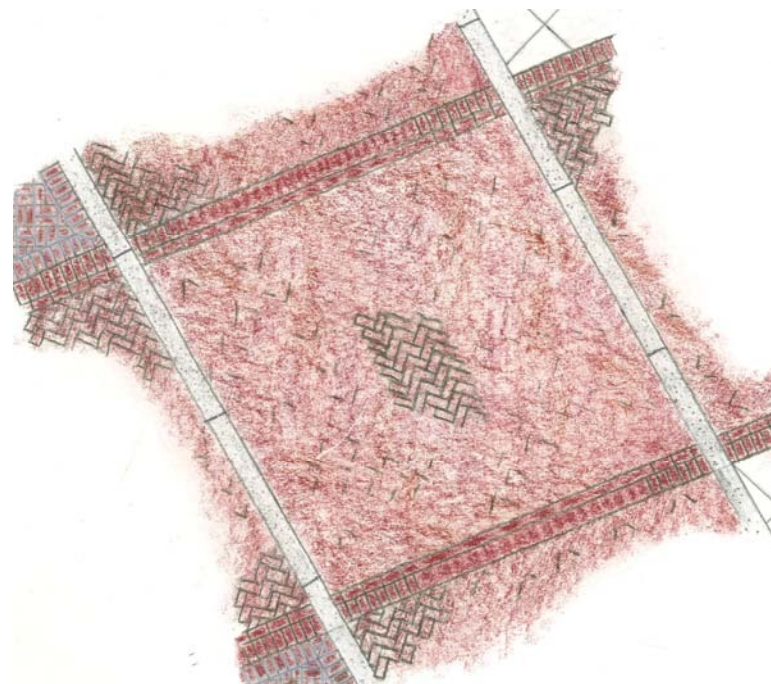


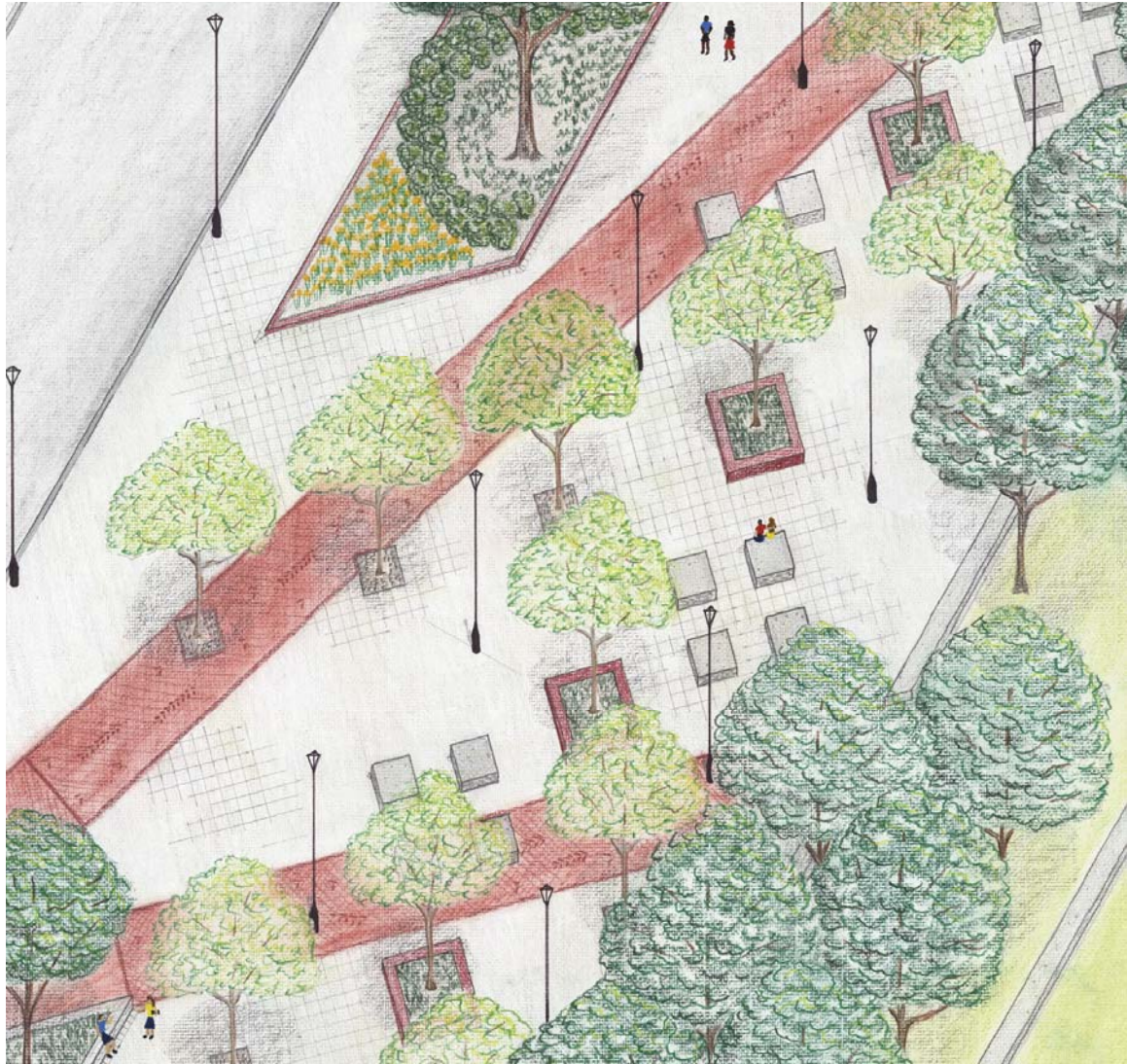
Granite table with wooden benches.





Brick paving found in sections of sidewalk scattered throughout the area was used to emphasize the walkways preserved from the old park and the plaza around the fountain. Granite cobblestone, frequently used in alleys in the area, was used for tree pits and for the paving in the fountain basin. Both of these materials help tie the park to older patterns of construction in the area.





The paving for the plaza draws on the combination of brick and larger concrete pavers found throughout the VCU campus. Unlike the paving at VCU, which combines the materials into a single pattern, the paving for the plaza contrasts the grid of concrete pavers and the pattern of existing paths paved in brick.

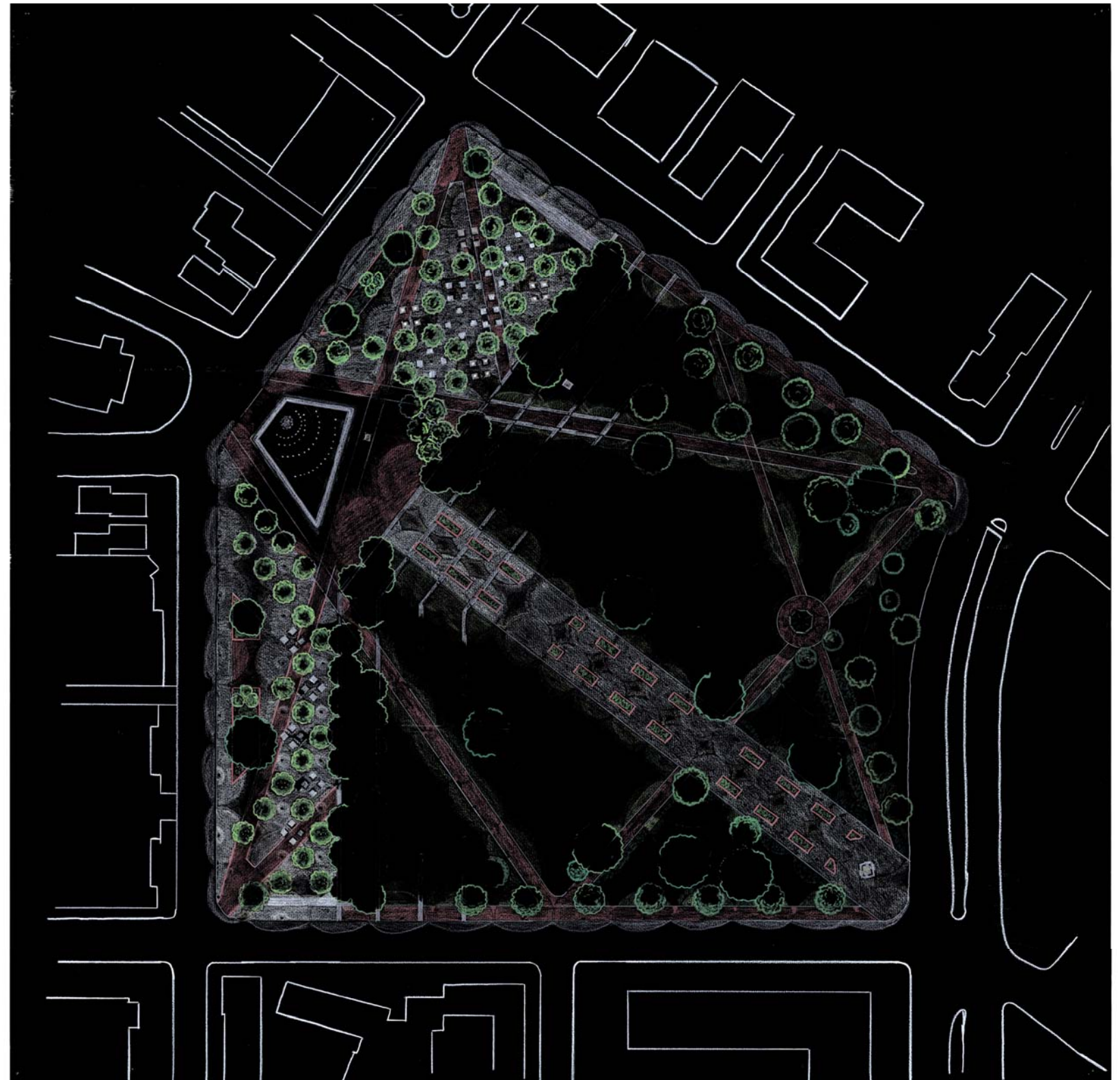


The grid of concrete pavers also picks up on the scored concrete sidewalk in front of the landmark theater across Laurel Street.



Improved lighting in the park, particularly in the plaza and along the central walk, creates a sense of security, promoting night time use of the park.

Light fixtures used throughout the VCU campus were used in the design for Monroe park, creating a sense of cohesion between the two.



PART FOUR: CONCLUSION



CONCLUSION



This study has presented one possible means of reconciling our desire to maintain a connection with the past with our need to participate in the shaping of our physical environment. Rather than focusing on preservation of the past, this approach seeks to carry forward the legacy of the past in ways that are relevant to the present. At the heart of this idea is an understanding of history as an ongoing process of development running from past to present. Instead of focusing on static moments in the history of a place, exploration of the past focuses on the dynamic nature of place. Forces of change, both direct and indirect, alter the reality of a place over time, making it impossible to truly recreate any one moment in the past. However, an understanding of not only what worked in the past but why it worked, and of what has changed and what remains the same, provides an opportunity to recreate a place in ways that provide a continuation of that place's process of development. Comparisons between past and present circumstances, with respect to both the specific place and its larger context, suggest potential changes and reveal both physical and more intangible sources of continuity. Based on a thorough understanding of the site and its surroundings, aspects of change and continuity come together to create a sense of place manifesting both current realities and a connection to the past.

In the case of Monroe Park, exploration of the past and analysis of the present showed that the sources of the park's earlier success had eroded over time as the surrounding area changed. The changes proposed in the new design for Monroe Park draw heavily on lessons learned from the park's earlier periods of success. The proposed design does not attempt to recreate the form of these earlier successes as they were, but rather seeks to translate them in ways that relate to present circumstances. The proposed design seeks to increase the presence of Monroe Park in the surrounding urban landscape by redefining the park's place in the changed composition of its present environment. The old structure of the park, focused on a relationship to surrounding areas that no longer holds true, is replaced by a structure which addresses new relationships based on its current surroundings. The proposed design seeks to capitalize on the potential role of the park in the day to day life of the surrounding VCU campus, providing a new source of energy for the park. Numerous existing elements are preserved. These existing elements provide a layered effect that allows the new elements to be understood in relation to the old park. At the same time, the incorporation of existing elements into the new design reflects the continuity of the park's history in

the face of change. The buildings facing onto the park, reflecting eras from the 1870's to the present, provide physical evidence of the changes which have occurred around the park during its history. The improved visual connections between the park and these buildings highlight the ongoing relationship between the park and its changing surroundings throughout time, rather than focusing on any one specific period. Both aspects of change and continuity in the proposed design seek to build on the legacy of the past to return Monroe Park to a role as a vital public space and defining aspect of the area.

As the study of Monroe Park illustrates, this approach relies not only on the specifics of the site's history and current circumstances, but on the agency of the designer in shaping of the exploration and interpretation of discoveries. The site specific nature of this approach, combined with the agency of the designer, allows for wide application, with responses as varied as the sites considered and designers involved. The focus on the past as a means of gaining an improved understanding of the present provides a foundation for both innovation and preservation. James Corner's criticism that "all hope for the future is replaced by too high a regard for past accomplishments" (9) may say as much about the public's lack of faith in the reasons for change as it does about our regard for the past. However, change is inevitable, and the continued viability of our public spaces demands acknowledgement of the changes that shape their relationships to their surroundings. Innovation which makes sense in the larger framework of the ongoing development of a site provides a powerful means of overcoming this lack of faith. When innovation creates a means of providing continuity with regard to meaning, vitality, and sense of place, the result is a connection to the legacy of the past that reflects the dynamic nature of place. Ultimately, this source of continuity is more real, reflecting the continued relevance of physical and intangible elements in the face of change, than the artificial efforts to freeze a place at a specific moment in time. Design that builds upon an understanding of both the forces of change and continuity provides the best hope for extending the legacy of a place in ways that remain relevant in the living present.



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