Smithsonian
National Museum of African American History and Culture

Bulfinch Gatepost Protected During Construction
Bulfinch Gateposts and Gatehouses

Research Summary

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**Introduction:**
The Bulfinch gateposts and gatehouses presently consist of two gatehouse and eight gateposts structures stationed within the Washington D.C. area. Designed by Capitol architect Charles Bulfinch, these ten architectural features are the only known surviving elements of the fence enclosure installed around the United States Capitol grounds in the 1820s. Building on previous, yet scattered research, this summary will document the history of these structures in order provide a comprehensive reference source for the Smithsonian Institution, the National Park Service, and other pertinent organizations.

**Locations and Dimensions**

**Gateposts:**
- NW corner of 15th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW (Figure 1)
  - One (1) gatepost
  - Latitude: 38° 53’ 32”; Longitude: 77° 02’ 03”
  - Dimensions: See Figure 2
- SW corner of 15th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW (Figure 3)
  - One (1) gatepost
  - Latitude: 38° 53’ 30”; Longitude: 77° 02’ 03”
  - Dimensions: See Figure 2
- SE corner of 15th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW (Figure 4)
  - One (1) gatepost
  - Latitude: 38° 53’ 30”; Longitude: 77° 02’ 01”
  - Dimensions: See Figure 2
- SW Corner of 7th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW
  - One (1) gatepost
  - Latitude: 38° 53’ 32”; Longitude: 77° 01’ 28”
  - Dimensions: See Figure 5
  - Entrance of the National Arboretum, at New York Avenue and Hickey Lane, NE
  - Four (4) gateposts
  - Latitude and Longitude: Unknown
  - Dimensions: Unknown

**Gatehouses:**
- NE Corner of 17th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW
  - One (1) gatehouse

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2. NPS 1973 Nomination Form, p. 5.
3. NPS 1973 Nomination Form, p. 5.
4. NPS 1973 Nomination Form, p. 5.
5. No official image of the four gateposts at the National Arboretum exists. They have not been measured or extensively photographed by any government agency.
- Latitude: 38° 53' 33''; Longitude: 77° 02' 22''
- Dimensions: See Figures 6 and 7
- NW Corner of 15th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW
  - One (1) gatehouse
  - Latitude: 38° 53' 33''; Longitude: 77° 02' 03''
  - Dimensions: See Figure 8

**Present Appearance**

**Gateposts:**

The four square Aquia Creek sandstone gateposts on Constitution Avenue and the four posts located at the National Arboretum have identical, classically inspired compositions. Each post consists of a base, seven levels of horizontal bands on their shaft, a frieze of running guilloche ornament, and a scrolled, closed bonnet-like capital. The facade and rear of the capitals encloses a stylized acanthus leaves within two upward turned volutes. Centered on top of each of the rounded capitals is a wide rope carving that can be seen on the sides of the scrolled edges. The acanthus leaf and guilloche pattern frequently appeared in ancient Greek and Roman architectural structures. For each of the Constitution Avenue posts, the façade with the acanthus leaf faces Constitution Avenue. The National Arboretum gateposts have their acanthus leaf facades oriented to New York Avenue.

Called gateposts because of their original incorporation in the fence line that once surrounded the grounds of the United States Capitol building and then later a fence that lined Constitution Avenue, the posts on Constitution Avenue now stand independently and are not connected to any sort of fence enclosure. The four posts at the National Arboretum are part of an entrance drive, with two posts along each side of the drive. A gate divides each pair, while a small section of metal fence divides each post and extends beyond the pair of posts. Due to their age and sporadic preservation, the posts are quite deteriorated. Large portions of the sandstone are black due to pollution. All of the posts are missing pieces of sandstone, some more than others. The Friends of the National Arboretum compiled the New York Avenue posts from demolished posts deposited in Fort Totten Park. Due to the piece meal construction, they are more significantly damaged than then Constitution Avenue posts.\(^6\)

**Gatehouses:**

Both gatehouses are one room structures built of Aquia Creek sandstone. The exterior of the buildings exhibits the same banded stone design seen on the pillars. A centered, rounded doorway

\(^6\) The 1991 construction of the New York Avenue posts will be discussed later in this summary.
Bibliography


Allen, William C. Telephone conversation with Moira Gallagher, October 5, 2011.


Scott, Gary. Telephone conversation with Moira Gallagher, October 12, 2011.

Scott, Gary. Telephone conversation with Moira Gallagher, October 20, 2011.


Images

Figure 1. Moira Gallagher “Bulfinch Gatepost Located at the NW Corner of 15th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW,” October 2011.


Figure 3. Moira Gallagher “Bulfinch Gatepost Located at the SW Corner of 15th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW,” October 2011.

Figure 4. Moira Gallagher “Bulfinch Gatepost Located at the SE Corner of 15th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW,” October 2011.


Figure 12. Panoramic Image, Taken from the Top of the Smithsonian castle, ca. 1876. National Park Service.


Figure 1: Moira Gallagher "Bulfinch Gatepost Located at the NW Corner of 15th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW," October 2011.
Figure 3: Moira Gallagher “Bulfinch Gatepost Located at the SW Corner of 15th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW,” October 2011.
Figure 4: Moira Gallagher “Bulfinch Gatepost Located at the SE Corner of 15th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW,” October 2011.
Figure 12: Panoramic Image, Taken from the Top of the Smithsonian castle, ca. 1876 [Part 1]. National Park Service.

Figure 12: Panoramic Image, Taken from the Top of the Smithsonian castle, ca. 1876 [Part 2]. National Park Service.