

**Testimony of Emily Hotaling Eig
Before the Zoning Commission
re: McMillan Park PUD**

Good Evening,

My name is Emily Hotaling Eig. I am an architectural historian and preservation specialist with EHT Traceries.

I was retained by Vision McMillan Partners in 2008. Over the course of the last six years I have helped shape the preservation component of the Master Plan. My work has entailed extensive research into the history of the entire site and documented the evolution of the sand filtration site from an active industrial waterworks to an obsolete utilitarian plant that has been romanticized in its abandonment.

THE PROBLEM WITH THE CELLS AND CONCRETE ROOF

Over these years, I have looked at many ways of approaching the preservation of the site. What I learned was that the strict preservation of the site would mean its continued isolation. The site was never meant to support public activities on its surface or within: its design limited its use to a specific function, and its longevity was inextricably linked to the continuation of that function. Unfortunately, the prospect, however attractive, of adaptively re-using the cells as a museum, galleries, restaurants, grocery stores, residences, fisheries, etc., is not realistic. Unlike buildings which are designed to support human occupancy, this industrial site was not meant to serve those functions. The friable character of the unreinforced concrete challenges the site's preservation, for it is simply not stable enough to support activities above or within. You will see here some attempts at stabilization of the above- and below-ground resources by DC Water as they construct the First Street Tunnel.

In fact, to retain the cells as proposed in the VMP project will require extensive and costly structural intervention to avoid ruining their elegant groin vaults, a process that will also likely require reconstruction. In very simple terms, none of the stabilization solutions, as detailed in the Silman report, allow for good preservation solutions. Anything necessary to make them safe and code-compliant by modern standards would basically destroy their integrity. The cells are like sandcastles: they appear solid and sturdy, but in reality will eventually crumble without notice.

THE STRENGTH OF THE PRESERVATION PLAN

As determined by the HPRB when it voted to support the design guidelines and architectural concepts of the plan, it retains many character-defining features of the historic landmark McMillan Park site.

- Overall, the site will continue to read as a whole: its form, organization, topography (including the berm), and almost all above-ground historic built features will be retained

- Retains the historic tripartite organization and horizontal plinth of the cells that is so critical to the interpretation of the historic operations of the filtration plant
- Recreates the site-defining Olmsted Walk
- Re-purpose two underground cells
- Provides a concentration of public experience in the Southern third where the plain is most distinct and one's experience on the plain is the most special
 - Connects to the reservoir site across First Street
 - Allows the southern portion of the original plain to be to be read very close to how it was originally

HISTORIC VIEWS

- The historic views from the McMillan site are being preserved from the southern section looking west, south and east.
- The views north are already compromised by the construction beginning in the 1950s of the hospitals directly across Michigan Avenue. These buildings and parking structures, as well as large trees on the Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH) campus, block views to and from AFRH.

THIS SITE WAS NOT DESIGNED AS A PUBLIC PARK

The working sections of McMillan were not open to the public, while the Park area west of First Street was. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. saw the McMillan complex as three distinct areas: RESERVOIR, PLAIN, and PARK

- Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. described in "An Outline of A General Plan for the Landscape Treatment of McMillan Park," from March 27, 1908, three distinct areas:
 - a. The area including the covered reservoirs, filter bed, sand washers and their appurtenances [sic]...[PLAIN]
 - b. The spacious and impressive open reservoir, with the enclosing banks and hillsides, including the curvilinear banks of the filter beds which face toward it...treat the landscape as a whole, informally and picturesquely... [RESERVOIR]
 - c. The southerly part, lying in the main below the dam of the reservoir...is a separate appendage serving no practical function in the operation of the waterworks, and presenting a distinct landscape unit. It can be shaped into an agreeable and consistent piece of informal park landscape with provision at the westerly end for a children's playground [PUBLIC PARK]

This is confirmed by Annual Reports of the Chief of Engineers describe two separate areas:

- 1) Washington Aqueduct, District of Columbia, filtration plant; and
- 2) Parking grounds, McMillan Park Reservoir

While people may have used the top of the filtration plant for recreational purposes, it was never designed for this, nor were these activities sanctioned or safe.

In these images, we see people utilizing the park area west of First Street for recreation.



Terence Vincent Powderly Photographic Prints, 1911-1921. The American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives.

MCMILLAN PARK, NOT MCMILLAN SAND FILTRATION PLANT, MAY HAVE BEEN THE FIRST "DE-FACTO INTEGRATED PARK IN DC."

- Photos here show Lillian Evanti, a black opera singer, and her son at McMillan Park ca. 1930.
- William Henry Jones in his book, *Recreation and Amusement Among Negroes in Washington, D.C.: A Sociological Analysis of the Negro in an Urban Environment*, published in 1927, states: "McMillan Park, located east of Howard University and surrounding the New Reservoir, has now been taken over almost exclusively by Negroes."
- This statement refers to the open area that hugged the actual reservoir to the north, south, and west that was designed and programmed for the public's use as a recreational park, not the industrial sections of the landmark site.



Lillian Evanti (Lillian Evan Tibbs and son Thurlow Tibbs) at McMillan Park ca. 1930.
Scurlock Studio Records, ca. 1905-1994, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.