

Mount Vernon and George Washington Memorial Parkways

1932



George Washington Memorial Parkway was built in stages between 1929 and 1970. The first segment, Mount Vernon Memorial Parkway, stretched from Arlington Memorial Bridge to Mount Vernon along the Potomac River in Washington, D.C., and was completed in 1932.

1935 aerial photo of Mount Vernon Memorial Parkway

The George Washington Memorial Parkway was designed for recreational driving. It links sites that commemorate important episodes in American history and preserve habitat for local wildlife. The parkway and its associated trails provide a scenic place to play and rest in the busy Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. It connects 22 sites that commemorate the nation's history and heritage. The trip by DC-area residents to see George Washington's family estate at Mount Vernon was seen in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a patriotic duty, as well as an opportunity to learn about American history and democratic values.

As the first modern motorway built by the federal government, it popularized advanced highway engineering and landscape design features and strongly influenced parkway and highway construction throughout the country. The parkway provides scenic views of the river and general vicinity and serves as one of the most highly traveled thoroughfares into the nation's capital. Many of today's parkways, which were once intended for scenic, recreational driving, have evolved into major urban and commuter routes.

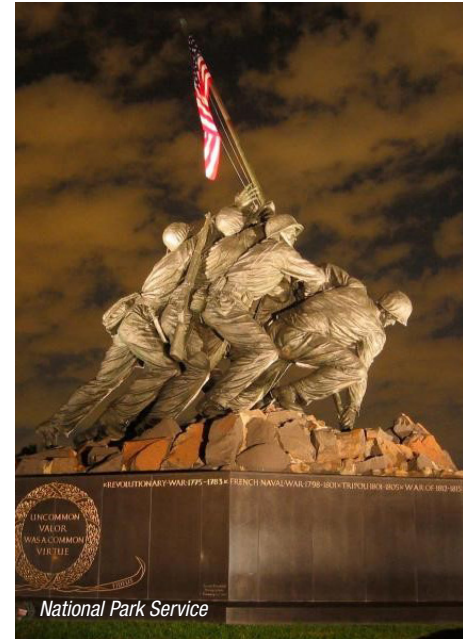


U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

Contributions & Crossroads
Our National Road System's Impact on the U.S. Economy and Way of Life

Mount Vernon and George Washington Memorial Parkways

1932



*George Washington Memorial Parkway (left).
Iwo Jima Memorial (above) along George
Washington Memorial Parkway.*

Quick Facts

- Completion of the Mount Vernon Memorial Parkway in 1932 fulfilled an idea that started in 1886. Citizens from Alexandria, Virginia, proposed this parkway as a memorial to the first president of the United States.
- This modern arterial parkway was the first of several constructed by the federal government. The U.S. Congress authorized surveys for the route in 1889, and nearly 40 years later in 1928, passed enabling legislation.
- The parkway links the home of George Washington at Mount Vernon, Virginia, with Washington, D.C., at the Arlington Memorial Bridge, 16 miles north. Construction of this scenic parkway began in late 1929 and was completed in the spring of 1932.
- Nineteenth-century Americans regarded Mount Vernon as a national shrine. The journey to Mount Vernon was cast as a patriotic pilgrimage that would improve the visitor's character and strengthen the nation by fostering greater appreciation for the ideas, events, and values of the early republic.
- Influenced by the design of the parkways in Westchester County, New York, the Mount Vernon Memorial Parkway borrowed some earlier ideas and added some new. The design incorporated several new concepts and technologies in the road geometrics, bridges, pavement design, and construction. These ideas further served as models for other highways and parkways to come.
- The right-of-way for the Mount Vernon Memorial Parkway had a 200-foot minimum width, except through the city of Alexandria. Additional rights-of-way were acquired to protect the scenic features and restrict encroachments.
- The design included scenic overlooks and historic features. Subsequent construction of a parallel pedestrian walkway and bicycle path along the length of the parkway has increased the recreational use and enjoyment of this historic parkway.
- In 1989, the Maryland road segment was renamed Clara Barton Parkway in honor of the founder of the American Red Cross, whose house is preserved near the parkway at Glen Echo.

Reference and Additional Information

<https://www.nps.gov/gwmp/index.htm>

<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/scenichistory.cfm>