

# *Explore!*

HIGHLIGHTS AND MAP OF  
THE U.S. CAPITOL GROUNDS



U.S. CAPITOL  
*Visitor Center*

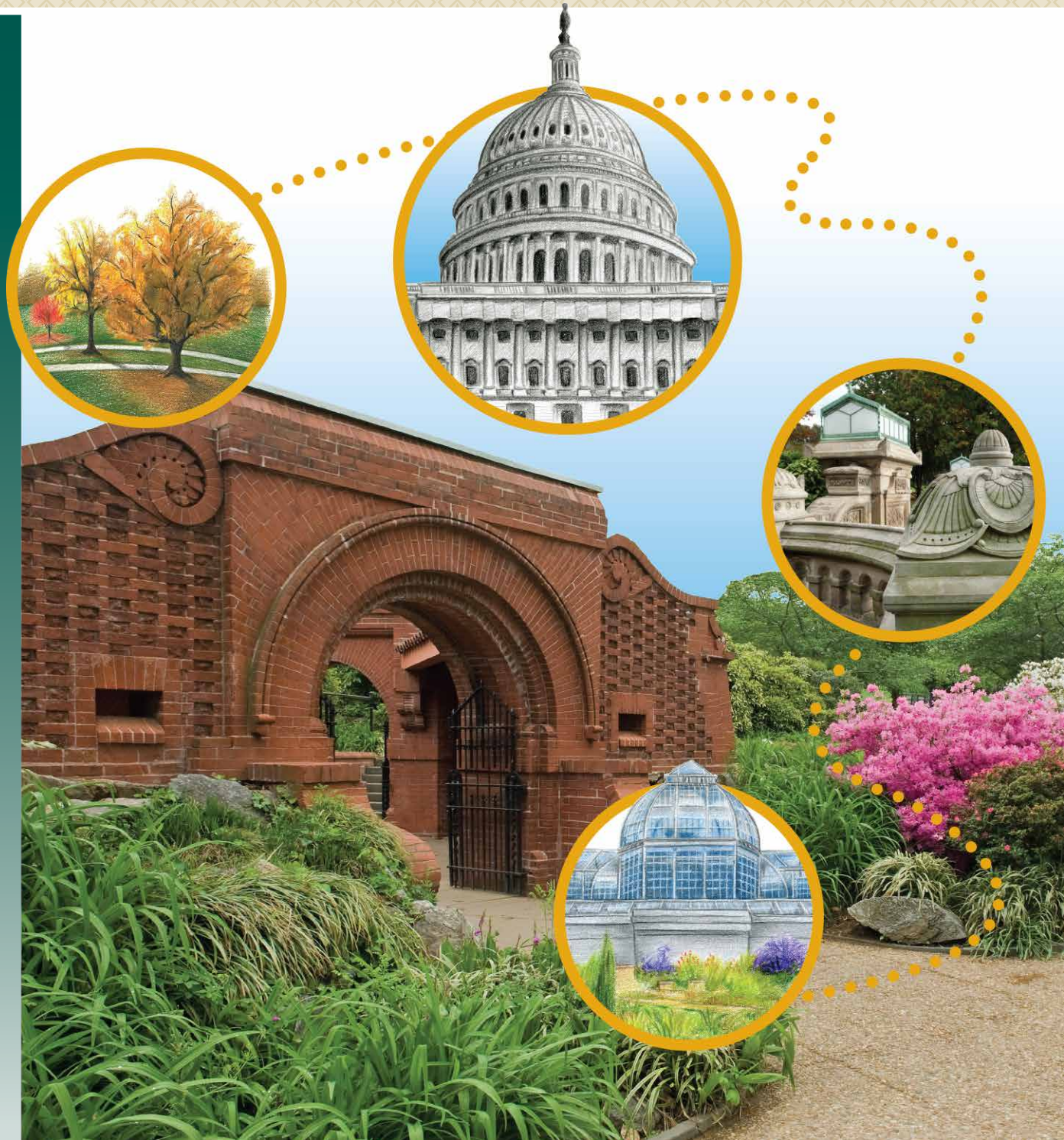
**T**his guide and map highlight features of the U.S. Capitol Grounds. Begin your exploration anywhere on the map. As you follow walkways, enjoy the many scenic views of the Capitol and its surrounding landscape.

Once a rural area, the Capitol Grounds today provide a park-like setting that offers a picturesque contrast to the formal architecture of the building. The grounds, with many trees, bushes, and flowers that bloom from spring to fall, were designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. Olmsted is hailed as the father of landscape architecture in America. He was a visionary who foresaw the need for natural spaces in urban settings. He also is renowned for his landscape designs for Central Park in New York City, Biltmore Estate in North Carolina, and the National Zoo in Washington, D.C.



*Frederick Law Olmsted*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE





## U.S. CAPITOL GROUNDS



- 1 United States Capitol
- 2 Trolley Stop Shelters
- 3 Summerhouse
- 4 Commemorative and Memorial Trees
- 5 West Front Lawn
- 6 The Peace Monument
- 7 Ulysses S. Grant Memorial
- 8 The Garfield Monument
- 9 United States Botanic Garden



### 1 The United States Capitol

The U.S. Capitol is recognized worldwide as a monument to the American people and their government. The Capitol with its magnificent dome has become a landmark of neoclassical architecture—a style inspired by the buildings of ancient Greece and Rome.

The U.S. Capitol has been the home of Congress since 1800. The Senate meets in the wing to the north, and the House meets in the wing to the south. When the flag is flying above a wing, it means the legislative body that meets there is in session. Since the Capitol's construction began in 1793, the building has changed many times. Its newest addition, the Capitol Visitor Center, opened in 2008.

### Trolley Stop Shelters

Stand under the trolley stop shelter and imagine yourself waiting for a trolley while enjoying magnificent views of the Capitol. This wrought iron shelter is one of two built for visitors who waited for trolleys that once stopped at the Capitol. Trolley tracks used to run through the Capitol Grounds from Independence Avenue. The trolleys carried visitors to the Capitol as well as to other places in the city, such as the Treasury Department, the State Department, and Union Station.



2

### 3 Summerhouse

Olmsted designed the Summerhouse as a place to escape Washington's hot summer sun and to enjoy views of the Capitol. Sit on one of the shaded benches, relax and examine the architectural details that surround you. Above one of the benches a window looks into a small grotto, or cave. Listen to the water as it splashes over the rocks. The fountain in the center of the grotto once provided drinking water pumped from a spring.



4

### Commemorative and Memorial Trees

Many of the trees on the Capitol Grounds were planted to commemorate or memorialize members of Congress, other notable citizens, national organizations and historic events. In addition, more than 30 states have presented gifts of their state tree to the Capitol Grounds. Many of the trees bear plaques that identify the species of the tree and its historic significance.



### West Front Lawn

This area creates a formal setting for the Capitol's West Front, the side of the building that faces the National Mall. Beginning with the inauguration of Ronald Reagan in 1981, presidential inaugurations have been held on the marble terrace designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. Surrounding the lower part of the West Front lawn are stone walls, lamp posts and fountains also designed by Olmsted and Thomas Wisedell with carvings inspired by nature.

5



The Peace Monument

6

The marble **Peace Monument** honors sailors who died at sea during the Civil War. Classical female figures represent Grief and History (at the top), Victory, and Peace. Infant figures of two Roman gods, Mars (war) and Neptune (the sea), appear at Victory's feet.

7

The **Ulysses S. Grant Memorial**, overlooking the center of the Mall, is the largest statuary group in Washington, D.C. Groups of soldiers and horses flank the mounted portrait of the Civil War general.

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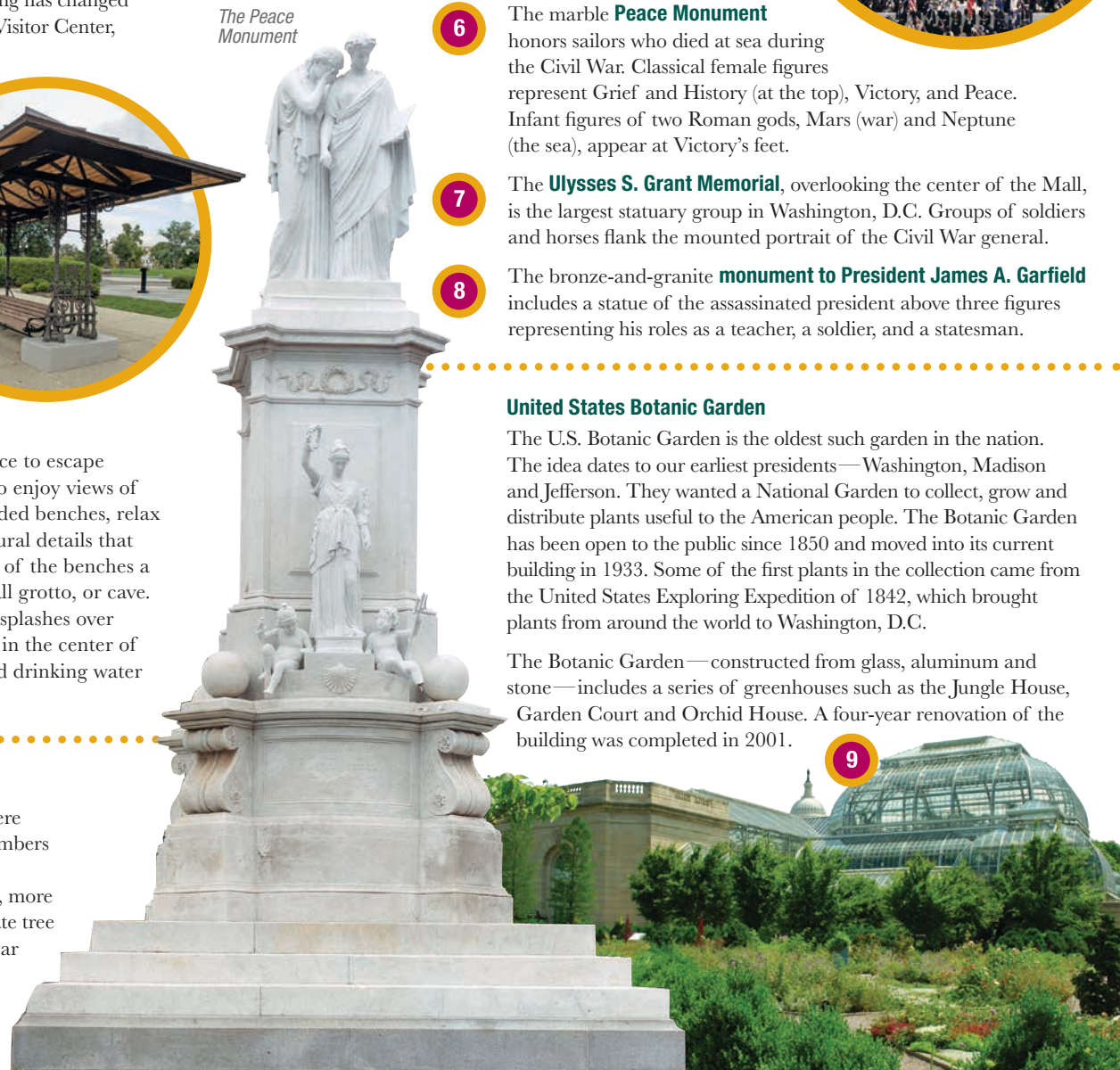
The bronze-and-granite **monument to President James A. Garfield** includes a statue of the assassinated president above three figures representing his roles as a teacher, a soldier, and a statesman.

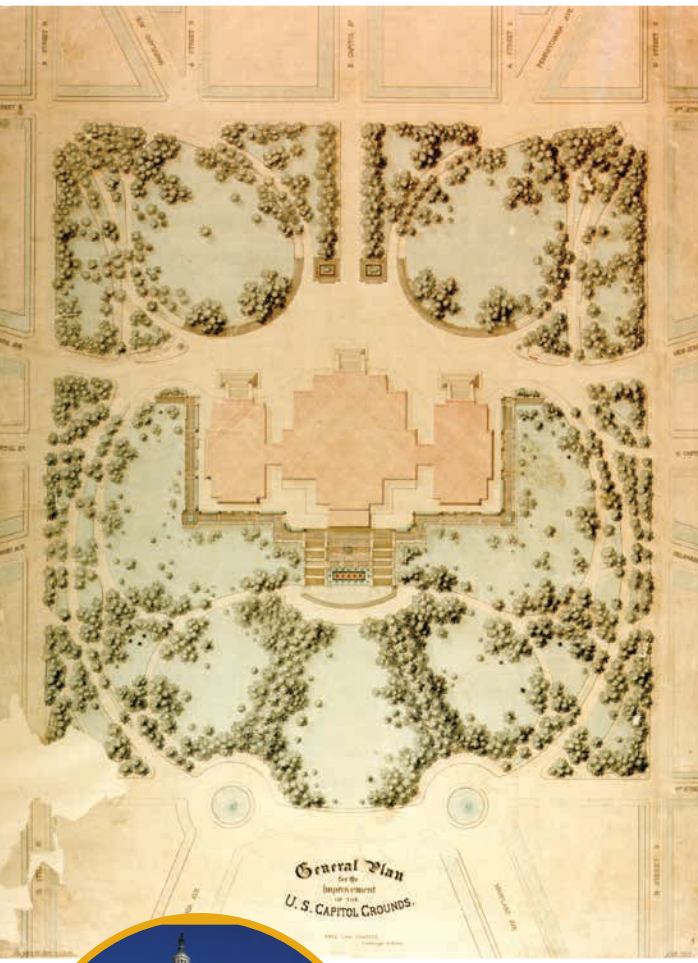
### United States Botanic Garden

The U.S. Botanic Garden is the oldest such garden in the nation. The idea dates to our earliest presidents—Washington, Madison and Jefferson. They wanted a National Garden to collect, grow and distribute plants useful to the American people. The Botanic Garden has been open to the public since 1850 and moved into its current building in 1933. Some of the first plants in the collection came from the United States Exploring Expedition of 1842, which brought plants from around the world to Washington, D.C.

The Botanic Garden—constructed from glass, aluminum and stone—includes a series of greenhouses such as the Jungle House, Garden Court and Orchid House. A four-year renovation of the building was completed in 2001.

9





General Plan  
for the  
Improvement of  
U.S. CAPITOL GROUNDS



*Olmsted's 1874 plan for  
the Capitol Grounds*

Olmsted believed that city dwellers needed public parks in which to relax and enjoy nature. The Capitol Grounds' open spaces and curving walkways contrast with the straight, formal lines of the building. Groupings of trees and shrubs frame different views of the Capitol, which create opportunities for great photos.

## LOCATION & HOURS

The Capitol Visitor Center, the public entrance to the U.S. Capitol, is located below the East Plaza of the Capitol between Constitution and Independence Avenues.

**Hours:** The Capitol Visitor Center is open to the public from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Saturday. It is closed on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, New Year's Day, and Inauguration Day.

**Official Business:** Visitors with official business appointments may enter the Capitol Visitor Center as early as 7:15 a.m.

**Accessibility:** Listening devices with audio description of the U.S. Capitol tour orientation film and Exhibition Hall are available at the Information Desks. Visitors may request wheelchairs at the North Coat Check located on the Upper Level or from Capitol Visitor Center staff. All restrooms are accessible.

**International Visitors:** Visitors may request listening devices for foreign-language versions of the U.S. Capitol tour orientation film and the Exhibition Hall audio tour at the Information Desks.

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*All photographs courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol unless otherwise noted.*



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