

## **ABSTRACT**

*This paper examines the labeling of trees on the National Mall, specifically at the United States Botanic Garden, Smithsonian Gardens, the United States Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Capitol Grounds, and questions how these individual tree collections might together better form an arboretum at the center of the nation's capital. The notion of an arboretum in the heart of Washington is not new: George Washington initiated it with his 1796 proposal to plant trees from all thirteen states in the nation's new capital (Wulf, 2011); the Columbian Institute for the Promotion of Arts and Sciences, the forerunner of the U.S. Botanic Garden, started planting trees in 1816 (Fallen, 2007); Andrew Jackson Downing's designs, implemented in the 1850s, created a "museum of trees and shrubs" for the enjoyment and education of people (Ottesen, 2011); and Frederick Law Olmsted reshaped and planted Capitol Hill, labeling the trees in the manner of an arboretum (Choukas-Bradley, 2008). While some of these 19<sup>th</sup> century efforts were greatly altered through the work of the McMillan Commission in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, over the past several decades, the activity of collecting and labeling a great variety of trees for the education of the public has increased (Ottesen, 2011). Through archival research and a contemporary field survey of tree labeling, this paper documents the history of arboreta on the National Mall and presents the present day systems of labeling from garden to garden. It suggests that tree labels across the National Mall might be better coordinated between collections and concludes that the history of tree planting on the National Mall could be one educational part of this long-standing, but under recognized, arboretum.*