NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 11-90)

OMB No. 1024-0018

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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to compete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Mount Vernon Square Historic District

Other names/site number:

2. Location

Street & Number: [N/A] Not for Publication

City or town: District of Columbia [N/A] Vicinity

State: Washington Code: DC County: District of Columbia Code: 001 Zip Code:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [ ] nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [ ] nationally [ ] statewide [ ] locally. ([ ] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Robert Parker SHPO 8/6/99

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. ([ ] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
[✓] entered in the National Register.
( ) see continuation sheet
[ ] determined eligible for the National Register
( ) see continuation sheet
[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register
[ ] removed from the National Register
[ ] other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper: Carol J. Beall

Date of Action: 9/3/99

5. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	No. Resources within Property		
		Contributing	Noncontributing	
[X] Private	[ ] Building(s)	407	13	Buildings
[X] Public-Local	[X] District	0	0	Sites
[ ] Public-State	[ ] Site	0	0	Structure
[ ] Public-Federal	[ ] Structure	0	0	Objects
	[ ] Object	407	13	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
N/A

Number of contributing Resources previously listed in the National Register 2

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)	Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
DOMESTIC: Single Dwellings	DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling
DOMESTIC: Multiple Dwellings	DOMESTIC: Multiple Dwellings
DOMESTIC: Secondary Structures	DOMESTIC: Secondary Structures
COMMERCE/TRADE: Business	COMMERCE/TRADE: Business
COMMERCE/TRADE: Professional	COMMERCE/TRADE: Professional
COMMERCE/TRADE: Financial Institutions	COMMERCE/TRADE: Financial Institutions
COMMERCE/TRADE: Specialty Stores	COMMERCE/TRADE: Specialty Stores
COMMERCE/TRADE: Warehouses	COMMERCE/TRADE: Warehouses
GOVERNMENT: Fire Station	COMMERCE/TRADE: Restaurant
EDUCATION: Schools	GOVERNMENT: Fire Station
RELIGION: Religious Facility	GOVERNMENT: Correctional Facility
RELIGION: Church School	EDUCATION: Library
RECREATION AND CULTURE: Outdoor Recreation	RELIGION: Religious Facility
	RELIGION: Church School
	RECREATION AND CULTURE: Outdoor Recreation

7. Description

Architectural Classification (enter categories from instructions)	Materials (enter categories from instructions)	
Italianate	foundation:	Stone; Brick; Concrete Block
Second Empire	walls:	Clapboard; Brick; Limestone; Granite
Queen Anne	roof:	Flat; Sloped; Gable; Mansard; Hipped
Renaissance Revival	other:	
Commercial Style		
Colonial Revival		

Narrative Description

Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets

[X] See continuation sheet

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark x in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

[X] **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

[ ] **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

[X] **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

[ ] **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark x in all the boxes that apply.)

[ ] **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

[ ] **B** removed from its original location.

[ ] **C** a birthplace or grave.

[ ] **D** a cemetery.

[ ] **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

[ ] **F** a commemorative property.

[ ] **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture
Community Planning & Development
Social History
Ethnic Heritage: Black

Period of Significance

1845-1945

Significant Dates

1845
1862
1872

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Unknown

Architect/Builder

9. Major Bibliographic References

[ ] See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

[X] preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67)
[X] previously listed in the NR
[ ] previously determined eligible by the National Register
[ ] designated a National Historic Landmark
[ ] recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #_____
[ ] recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #_____

Primary location of add. data:

[X] State SHPO office
[ ] Other State agency
[ ] Federal agency
[ ] Local government
[ ] University
[X] Other
Specify repository:
EHT Traceries

[X] See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property approximately 100 acres

UTM References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	/1 /8 /	/3/2/4/6/4/0/	/4/3/0/7/7/4/0/
2	/1 /8 /	/3/2/4/4/4/5/	/4/3/0/8/0/2/0/
3	/1 /8 /	/3/2/4/9/0/5/	/4/3/0/8/0/2/0/
4	/1 /8 /	/3/2/4/9/2/0/	/4/3/0/8/2/0/0/
5	/1 /8 /	/3/2/5/5/0/0/	/4/3/0/8/1/6/4/
6	/1 /8 /	/3/2/5/4/8/5/	/4/3/0/8/0/8/0/

[ ] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The Mount Vernon Square Historic District begins at the intersection of 7th Street and New York Avenue, NW. The boundary runs northeast on New York Avenue, including all the properties fronting the avenue to the north, and turns north on 1st Street. Running one block north on 1st

[X] See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the proposed historic district are comprised of a portion of the much larger community that grew around Mount Vernon Square. Drastic physical changes in the latter part of the 20th century have created two distinct neighborhoods, Mount Vernon Square and Mount

[X] See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title Laura V. Trieschmann, Architectural Historian
Organization EHT Traceries Date July 27, 1999
Street & Number 5420 Western Avenue Telephone (301) 656-5283
City or Town Chevy Chase State Maryland Zip code 20815

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name _____
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of the Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

Early Architecture of the Northern Liberties: 1845-1865

The oldest buildings remaining in the Mount Vernon Square historic district date from the mid-19th century and the Civil War era. This construction, overwhelmingly devoted to residential development, is a direct result of the northward migration along the established turnpike of 7th Street. Generally, the buildings stand two stories in height and are two bays wide. Their roofs vary from continuous side gable over a group of dwellings to the slightly sloped roof that typically covers a single or paired structure. As a rule, these buildings have flat facades with limited decorative details and are set back from the street to create landscaped front yards. The structures were typically built individually, in pairs, or in small groups. While influenced by the Italianate style, most of the earliest houses are quite sparse in their use of ornament, representing a builder's vernacular interpretation of a style. Ornamentation is limited to the cornice, consisting of a slightly overhanging element of wood construction. The cornice, detailed with scrolled brackets, was more commonly found on the buildings with sloping roofs.

The buildings from this period were typically of wood-frame construction, clad with weatherboard. However, because of the vulnerability of this building material, only nine wood-frame structures are currently extant in the Mount Vernon Square neighborhood. Thus, of the forty-three resources recorded from this period, the majority is of brick construction. Ridge Street, the alley dividing Square 513, contained the greatest concentration of wood-frame dwellings from this period, including the buildings at 418-420, 427-427-1/2, and 477-481 Ridge Street (1860, 1863, and 1855 respectively). Other examples were located at 467 M Street (1865, demolished) and 456-458 N Street (1867-1869).

Dwellings erected in brick displayed essentially the same form and massing as their wood-frame counterparts. An excellent example of this type of construction is located at 429 M Street (1859). This lone building is covered by a sloping roof crowned on the façade by a narrow bracketed cornice constructed of wood. Set back from the street with a substantially sized front yard, this building has a two-bay wide, flat façade of pressed brick.

The dwelling at 424 M Street, constructed in circa 1845, illustrates a typical alteration procedure in this neighborhood – cladding of a wood-frame structure with brick and the addition of a projecting bay on the flat-fronted façade. Portions of the original wood-frame structure are visible from the rear of the property, while the brick cladding fronts M Street. The 1887

alterations to the building display the common addition of projecting bays and corbelled brick cornices rather than applied wooden cornices. The oldest resource identified in the historic district, this freestanding building was originally part of a row. The single-family dwelling was converted into apartments in the 1940s, marking the residential shifts of the community as well as architectural fashions.

The most noteworthy building dating from this period is Fletcher Chapel, constructed at 401 New York Avenue in 1855. This freestanding wood-frame building is three bays wide and four bays deep. It stands one story in height on a raised foundation and has a front gable roof. Presently clad in permastone, the building was at one time sheathed in vertical board and batten siding, an exterior treatment popularized for rural structures by Andrew Jackson Downing in his influential 1842 publication *Cottage Residences.* The vernacular expression of this academic style is represented, although the chapel does not exhibit many of the telltale elements. The style is suggested, rather than stated, by the stylized corner pilasters that originally supported the pediment on the façade. The pediment gave the chapel a temple-fronted appearance, which was further articulated by a classical cornice with modillions and round window in the tympanum. The combination of classical elements, board and batten siding, and wooden louvered blinds and sash windows indicates an awareness of the architectural trends of the period, without strict adherence to the rules of their application.[1]

Victorian Architecture of Mount Vernon, 1866-1900

During the latter part of the 19th century, the construction of residential buildings in this area increased tenfold. Typically constructed in rows, the buildings are overwhelmingly built of brick. Of the 347 documented buildings from this period, including both commercial and domestic, over 300 were constructed of brick, while only 26 were constructed of wood framing. Only 301 buildings from this period are extant today.

The availability of mass-produced components from pattern books and hardware supply catalogues allowed local builders to create facsimiles of the most fashionable architectural styles. Brackets, finials, molded bricks, windows, paneled doors, and cast iron elements, as well as interior stairs and moldings were all ready-made and could be pieced together by builders in infinite varieties. Stylistically, row buildings from this period were inspired by eclectic, medieval sources, with English Gothic, Queen Anne, Romanesque, and French Second Empire

[1] Don't Tear It Down, "Lower Shaw/Mount Vernon East Survey Final Report," 1984, p. 25.

design motifs. Houses tended to be asymmetrical in form – emphasized by the towers, turrets, bay windows and oriels – and constructed in a dark palette of red brick and brownstone with wood and metal trim painted in somber tones. The masonry facades of the pressed brick and stone buildings were never painted, instead relying on their natural colors to convey character. Masonry joints of the facades were typically tinted to match the color of the brick. Architectural emphasis was placed on the fronts of the building, and sides for corner structures, while rear elevations were considered utilitarian, most often with ancillary ells that projected off a portion of the back wall.

The Building Projection Act of 1871, allowing for the construction of projecting bays into public space, and the enactment of municipal building codes between 1872-1878, prohibiting frame construction and wood cladding, had a profound affect on the architecture throughout Washington, D.C. and specifically in the Mount Vernon Square neighborhood. Houses constructed in this period also began to be larger in size and featured indoor plumbing as required by the building codes. While houses erected prior to 1875 were typically two stories in height, buildings constructed in the late 1870s and 1880s tended to be three stories. By the 1890s, houses in the area were more typically four full stories.

Projecting bays are a prominent and important character-defining feature of the majority of the row houses in the neighborhood. Within neighboring communities, the first projecting bays – dating from the early 1870s – were typically one story in height and of wood construction. They were tentative in character, appearing as if tacked onto the existing flat-fronted buildings as an afterthought. In Mount Vernon, the projecting bay arrived as an integral part of the original design; thus the majority of bays are constructed of brick rather than wood. This allowed for the architectural presentation to be more elegant and finished in appearance. The bays initially extended from the English basement to the first story. An excellent example of the height of the first projecting bays is found in the intact row of four dwellings at 451-457 M Street (1876) in Square 513. Physically imposing, the structure rises three stories in height on a slightly raised foundation. Yet, as was the fashion, the canted bays rise only the height of the first story. Thus, the projections are diminutive in size when compared to the overall massing of the building they adorn. The brick facades are ornately detailed with wide surrounds, projecting lintels, pedimented architraves, and heavy overhanging cornices of wood.

The odd-numbered side of the 1100 block of 5th Street (Square 514), constructed in 1874, is noteworthy as a block that was developed with buildings entirely devoid of projecting bays.

Decorative treatment, commonly applied to the projections on surrounding dwellings, was instead transferred to the heavily ornamented roofline and architraves. The unifying overhangs are identically finished with plain friezes below dentil molding, sawn-cut scrolled brackets with foliage, modillions composed of leaves, beed-and-reel, and ogee cornices.

As the period progressed, so did the depth, height, and universal use of projecting bays on neighborhood rowhouses, sometimes reaching above the roofline with a stylized parapet or tower. In addition to the larger proportions, the canted and round bays were ornamented with brackets, decorative trim, and blind balustrades or panels below the window openings. The use of a similar cornice treatment on the projecting bay and the top of the building united the façade's composition. Yet, the varying rooflines of the projections typically indicated an individual dwelling within a long row, with corbeling, segmental-arches, mansard roofs, conical caps, and stepped parapets. The effect created by the rows and their projecting bays is very much in keeping with the Victorian notion of the picturesque, as it could be achieved on a small urban rowhouse. The fifty-three houses fronting the four sides of Square 482 were designed by architect Thomas Franklin Schneider in 1890 and illustrate the use of projecting bays, and the variations applied to each.

By the 1880s and 1890s, rowhouse design showed variations with the use of rough-cut stone blocks on the foundations, brick corbelled cornices rather than Italianate-styled wooden cornices, and imposing roofs. One of the best examples of the 1890s is found in the row of buildings in the 430 block of M Street. The buildings were constructed by builder August Getz in 1891 as single-family dwellings. Each dwelling is two bays wide with alternating round and square projecting bays. Variations to the contiguous row are presented by the use of multiple roof forms, including mansard, conical, pyramidal, and hipped. Additionally, the many shapes and number of sashes in the window openings aid in creating individuality for the row. Although this is the case, foundations are identically clad in rough-cut stone blocks beveled to create a watertable where it meets the pressed brick. In keeping with the fashion in the 1890s, cornices consisting of corbelled brick rather than the more common applied wood or metal detailing. The main block of the structure consists of two full stories set above an English basement and is covered by a mansard roof that obscures the uppermost story. The existence of this hidden story is revealed through dormers and the top story of the projecting bays. Although the same height as the Getz's M Street buildings, Leon Dessez's row of houses at 218-224 N Street (1892) in Square 555 appear to be more petite because of the lack of telltale openings in the roofs of the main block and projecting bays.

Commercial design did not substantially differ from the residential trends. Commercial buildings, like those found along 7th Street and New York Avenue, were three and four stories in height. The buildings were divided into two zones; the lower devoted to public shopping space and the upper containing offices and hotels. The storefronts, the majority of which have been significantly altered to provide wider window openings, were marked by a narrow cornice that was simpler in design compared to the overhanging cornices at the roofline. The facades were typically flat fronted with heavily ornamented cornices of wood or metal. The ornamentation found on the roof cornice commonly mirrored the detailing over the window openings of the upper stories.

One of the most architecturally distinguished group of late 19th century commercial buildings in the Mount Vernon Square neighborhood are found in Square 450, within the 1000 block of 7th Street and the 640 block of L Street. Dating from the 1870s and 1880s, the buildings range in width from three to six bays wide. The ornate cornices that crown the facades denote each building individually, as each was designed and erected by different architects and builders. The most ornate structure in this grouping is the Isacc Levy and Son paint store at 1015-1/2 7th Street, erected in 1888. This building's architectural detailing is the epitome of the Italianate style with its heavy window hoods and finely detailed cornice. Many of the buildings used for commercial purposes today were originally constructed as dwellings. This is especially true of residential structures located on the corner of major thoroughfares like N Street, New Jersey Avenue, and 4th Street.

Early 20th Century Architecture of the Mount Vernon Neighborhood: 1900-1945

Rowhouse construction was primarily limited to the 19th century, as most of the area had been considerably infilled by the turn of the 20th century. Some of the few remaining vacant lots in residential blocks were developed with modest apartment buildings in the early 20th century to meet the residential shifts taking place. The first of the apartments was the New York Flats at 115 New York Avenue, constructed in 1902 to the design of Julius Wenig. Other early examples of apartment buildings are the Oakmont Flats at 225 Morgan Street (1903) and 422-424 Ridge Street (1904). The brick and stone apartment buildings each display the fashionable styles of the period, incorporating projecting bays, overhanging cornices, and molded lintels.

The national change in architectural taste away from the eclecticism of the Victorian period toward the classical was visible in Mount Vernon in the early 20th century, particularly in the

design of apartment buildings and flats. One of the best examples of architectural fashions during this period is seen in the Classical Revival style flats along the alley known as Morgan Street. Constructed in 1906 to the designs of Appleton P. Clark, the seven buildings in Square 555 were erected together as a row in a tripartite arrangement, with the center and end blocks projecting. The remaining blocks are recessed with two-story, wood-frame porches. The continuous ogee-molded cornice, watertable, and two-story, wood-frame porches covering the facades of the recessed blocks work to together to unify the face of the row. Classical detailing is prominently displayed in the front gable roof of the projecting blocks, the enclosed tympanum with a semi-circular opening, segmental and semi-circular arched openings, brick quoins, limestone keystones, and Tuscan columns. The row is not only one of the first examples of the Classical style in Mount Vernon, but illustrates a variation to the projecting bay ideal that was so popular in the latter part of the 19th century.

After the turn of the 20th century, the construction of larger commercial buildings, warehouses, and industrial structures began in earnest with the erection of over ten such facilities. Primarily constructed as infill development, the buildings were all constructed of brick with flat roofs. As the majority of the structures fronted 7th Street and New York Avenue, the facades were often detailed with many of the same architectural elements displayed on the residential buildings. The Yale Steam Laundry Building at 437-443 New York Avenue on Square 514 stands as one of the most prominent illustrations of early 20th century industrial buildings in Mount Vernon. The property consists of the 1902 laundry cleaning plant, the adjacent 1919 stable/garage, and the 1924 addition to the east elevation of the original structure. Designed in a modest interpretation of Classical Revival, the three-story laundry plant measures six bays wide with a two story, recessed entry bay detailed by limestone keystones, semi-circular arched windows, stringcourses, and columns. Above the third story is the ogee-molded metal architrave, serving as the base of the entablature. Within the unadorned frieze are the words "YALE STEAM LAUNDRY." Below the overhanging cornice is the bed molding, an ogee-molded metal profile that mimics the architrave. The metal cornice itself has heavy modillions on the soffit and an ogee-molded profile. The building was listed on the D.C. Inventory of Historic Resources in 1998.

The District of Columbia Police Station was constructed in the mid-1930s on Square 482S. Historically, the triangular site contained the Abbott School, a white grammar school erected in 1875. With the closing of the school in 1934, the building was razed and the brick and concrete police station was erected. The Colonial Revival style facility is two-stories in height and seven bays wide, presenting a horizontal massing not traditionally exhibited in the Mount Vernon

neighborhood. Like its neighbors, however, the building is constructed of red brick with a corbelled brick cornice and symmetrically placed openings.

The emergence of the automobile significantly impacted 20th century development and revitalization efforts along 7th Street, L Street, and New York Avenue. Auto showrooms, repair shops, and gas stations appeared along these major thoroughfares in the 1920s and 1930s. One of the oldest auto-related buildings in the area was located at 601 New York Avenue in Square 450. Now razed, the wood-frame gas station was constructed in 1915. Extant examples, constructed in brick, are located in the 600 block of L Street. Industrial by design, the buildings ranged in height from one to two stories with flat roofs. Wide, roll-up garage doors of wood or metal dominate the first stories. Expansive multi-light windows with metal muntins and wide mullions pierce the second stories.

One of the best examples of the shift from horse-drawn transportation to the automobile is the stable and garage at the Yale Steam Laundry. The stable/garage was constructed on the southeast corner of Lot 6 of Square 514, fronting on New York Avenue. The brick and concrete building, displaying its commercial purpose, has a rectangular plan. The contractor for the building was W. E. Mooney; A. B. Mullett and Company furnished the outline survey. The three courses of bricks on the façade have been laid in a soldier-course, serving as stringcourses above the concrete lintels. This ornament, contrasting to the brick, mimics the limestone detailing of the 1902 main cleaning plant. The façade and side elevations present two stories, while the north elevation reads from Browns Court as a single story. The building historically contained a stable on the first floor accessed via New York Avenue, and a garage on the second floor that was accessible from Browns Court because of the slope at the rear of the site. In less than ten years after the construction of the stable/garage, the Yale Steam Laundry's new stable would become partially obsolete as motor haulage began to dominate the industry.

Religious structures constructed during this period included the building of three churches; each sited on prominent corner lots. The earliest of these was Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church (now known as Mount Lebanon Baptist Church) at 1219 New Jersey Avenue in Square 555. Constructed in 1909, the church was designed by the architectural firm of Harding and Upman, with W.E. Mooney serving as contractor. The two-story church was constructed of stone and brick with narrow lancet and large Gothic style stained glass windows. The front gable facing New Jersey Avenue was augmented by the corner tower, measuring 37' by 60.' Occupying the same square, the Italian Baptist Church (Chiesa del Redentore) was constructed in 1923 at the

corner of New York Avenue and Kirby Street to the designs of architect Claughton West. Like the Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, the stone and brick Baptist church exhibits Gothic Revival style detailing including lancet arched windows, stained glass, and corner buttresses.

By the 1940s, the Mount Vernon Square community was fully developed, with over 430 resources. It was comprised of ornamental, late 19th century residential rowhouses and early 20th century commercial and industrial buildings. Predominately constructed of brick in a variety of colors, the architecture of the neighborhood continued to be stylistically compatible, despite the varying periods of development, architects, and property owners. While some significant buildings were lost during the 1968 riots and the subsequent urban redevelopment, many of the area's landmarks survive intact and continue to characterize the physical development of the community flanking 7th Street.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Mount Vernon Square Historic District is significant as a Victorian-era commercial and residential neighborhood located within the historic boundaries of the District of Columbia's Federal City. Developed largely between 1865 and 1910, the community was initially known as the Northern Liberties, having attained its name from the Northern Liberty Market, constructed in the 1840s on L'Enfant's Reservation 8. With the relocation of the market, and the creation of a landscaped park in the reservation, the neighborhood was unofficially titled "Mount Vernon." The developing neighborhood's rapid growth was in response to the city's increased demand for housing following the Civil War, the extensive programs to modernize the city in the 1870s, and the expansion of the national capital's economy and population. Seventh Street, chartered as a turnpike in 1810 by an act of Congress, became the spine of the neighborhood, as well as a primary transportation artery into the center of the city. Commercial development migrated northward along 7th Street, just across Massachusetts Avenue to the north, when the turnpike was macadamized in the early 1870s. The laying of streetcar rails along the north/south corridors of 4th, 7th, 9th, and 11th Streets, and east on New York Avenue further augmented development in the Mount Vernon community. The new streetcar technology opened up the Federal City for residential development, making it more convenient than ever to commute downtown to work and shop. Consequently, the Mount Vernon area, like many of its surrounding neighborhoods, grew as a cohesive residential neighborhood with nearly all of the rowhouses constructed by speculative builders and real estate developers. Most of the area's mid- to late 19th century brick architecture remains intact along the residential streets that radiate from the transportation corridors and commercial strips from which the Mount Vernon neighborhood evolved.

The Mount Vernon Square Historic District is also significant for its illustration of Washington's urban history, specifically the residential patterns of the working and middle classes. As Washington became increasingly segregated, the Mount Vernon neighborhood was striated with white residents living primarily in dwellings facing onto the public streets, while working class African Americans lived within the alleyways. The numerous alleys, labyrinths lined with dwellings, stables, and commercial structures, were isolated from the everyday life found on the surrounding public streets. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, legislation and the

humanitarian efforts of social organizations and individuals improved the welfare of the alley inhabitants, eventually eradicating alley dwellings altogether. This prompted northward migration to the nearby U Street neighborhood, which was emerging as the center of Washington's African American community. Consequently, the Mount Vernon neighborhood evolved into a predominately white and middle class area by the second quarter of the 20th century.

Today, the Mount Vernon neighborhood is defined by the many original mid- to late 19th century buildings, including residential and commercial structures fronting on both public streets and alleyways. This building stock includes limited examples of the wood-frame houses that pre-date the Civil War and that represent the long history of residential occupation in the neighborhood. The middle-class dwellings oriented to the public streets illustrate a variety of building types and the changing fashions in architectural design with vernacular interpretations of the late 19th and early 20th century revival styles. The resources are typically brick rowhouses flanked by one- and two-story commercial buildings, churches, and multi-story apartment buildings. Within the interiors of the squares, the extant alleys feature a mix of utilitarian residential, commercial, and auxiliary buildings such as stables and garages.

Defined by 20th-century development, the Mount Vernon Square Historic District meets National Register criteria A and C, and is significant under the themes of architecture and community planning/development with the period of significance extending from 1845 to 1945. The area comprising the Mount Vernon Square neighborhood consists of 420 historic properties, the majority of which are residential resources. Of the 420 properties, 407 contribute to the historic district, while twelve are non-contributing.

Although platted as part of the Federal City in 1790, the area saw little development in the period between 1790 and 1820. During this time, there was little turnover of property, and most of the real estate holdings were large and generally unimproved. In fact, when the federal government arrived in 1800, only 109 "permanent" structures (brick or stone) stood in all of Washington to house the 500 families already residing there and the additional 300 civilian members of the government. The District Commissioners reported 372 dwellings as "habitable," but as a cabinet

officer noted, "most of them [are] small miserable huts."[1] The commercial sector consisted of a few warehouses, wharves, and an abandoned hotel.[2]

The completion of 7th Street by 1822 laid the foundation for commercial development and residential growth north of Massachusetts Avenue. The second phase of development, extending from the Civil War period to the turn of the 20th century, involved the resubdivision of the large squares into smaller lots, the sale of these lots, the improvement of the area's infrastructure, and the emergence of a residential community burgeoning around commercial and transportation corridors. The final phase of development, from 1900 to 1945, saw the decline of alley dwellings and construction of gas stations, automobile garages, stores, laundries, and warehouses along the principal commuter routes of 7th Street and New York Avenue.

The Mount Vernon Square neighborhood retains some of its original early 19th century residential and commercial buildings, and many of its late 19th and early 20th century buildings. The greatest development phase for the area occurred in the last four decades of the 19th century, with the majority of the resources erected and designed by local builders and architects for speculative developers. Primarily dwellings, the buildings comprise an intact and cohesive collection of brick, flat- and bay-fronted rowhouses executed in a variety of styles and expressions. The form, massing, and siting of these buildings was shaped by the municipal building codes first enacted in 1871, and the mass production of building elements available to the speculative builder. This community is also significant for its intact alley dwellings and its commercial resources. The alley buildings are primarily composed of two-story, flat-fronted residential buildings. The commercial resources generally front 7th Street and New York Avenue, and stand two- to three-stories in height with storefronts on the first floor. These mercantile buildings range in date from the middle part of the 19th century to the early 20th century, documenting the existence of the significant transportation system that serviced the community as it grew northward. Collectively, the architecture of the Mount Vernon Square neighborhood has achieved significance as an embodiment of a distinctive period with artistic

[1] James Sterling Young, *The Washington Community, 1800-1828*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 22.
[2] Young, pp. 22-23.

value of ornamentation, style, and form.

Early History of the Mount Vernon Area: 1790-1840

Prior to the organization of the City of Washington, the entire territory that became the Federal City was part of some thirty tracts of land, known in their entirety since 1715 as Rock Creek Hundred. Rock Creek Hundred was originally part of Charles County and, later, Prince George's County, Maryland. Most of the settlers of the territory were farmers who raised tobacco, wheat, corn, and cattle. Other individuals, including merchants, bricklayers, and carpenters, who worked and lived in Georgetown or the larger municipality of Montgomery County, Maryland, began in the mid-18th century to purchase land in the area as a speculative venture. In 1791, when the choice for a site to be the new nation's capital was officially decided, nearly half of the original proprietors who had deeded their land in trust for the new city were the merchants and businessmen anticipating to benefit from the birth of the city.

At this time, the area that would become the Mount Vernon neighborhood was part of a tract of land known as *Port Royal*, which originally encompassed 500 acres patented by John Peerce in 1687. With the subdivision of the vast tract by 1791, Joseph Coombs, Jr., purchased the eastern third that included the Mount Vernon area. Clarification of the title, however, did not occur until 1794, after which Coombs was forced to convey ownership to William Bayly. By January 1796, Dominick Lynch and Comfort Sands of New York City owned the Mount Vernon area.[3]

Pierre L'Enfant's 1791 plan for the new Federal City included the Mount Vernon neighborhood, with Reservation 8 and its intersecting diagonal avenues and broad vistas as the focal point. Reservation 8 was created by 7th and 9th Streets where Massachusetts and New York Avenues intersected at K Street. The rectangular square was eventually bisected by 8th Street, thus creating two smaller squares. More commonly known today as Mount Vernon Square, Reservation 8 was not one of the seventeen government reservations designated for public

[3] Priscilla W. McNeil, "Rock Creek Hundred: Land Conveyed for the Federal City." *Washington History*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Spring/Summer 1991, p. 50.

buildings. Rather, the square was one of the original fifteen public squares to "be divided among the several states in the Union for each of them to improve."[4] L'Enfant proposed that the center of each square "will admit the Statues, Columns, obelisks, or any other ornaments, such as the different States may choose to erect...."[5] L'Enfant's plan for the fifteen "State" squares was never implemented; although the federal government had purchased 2.78 acres of land to be designated as Reservation 8 from Lynch and Sands.

In addition to the public reservations, the L'Enfant plan divided the capital city into a grid of squares, which were then numbered and subdivided. The acres not devoted to government use were divided into city blocks or squares, and each square further subdivided into lots. The initial development plans were designed to benefit the original proprietors and to encourage building construction. Squares were divided in half; one half remained the property of the proprietor, while the second half was to be publicly auctioned by the city commissioners to raise money for Washington's development. The first sale of lots on October 17, 1791 was intended to attract residents and speculators, and to promote sales of small parcels of land. Only selling thirty-one lots, the auction was not deemed a success. Thus, in 1793, the Commissioners abandoned the idea of lot auctions, and attempted to sell lots privately. This was equally unsuccessful. Despite the city's attempts to encourage development by subdividing and platting land, few properties were improved. The city's development lagged, the product of seeming disinterest, and the lack of serious commitment by Congress. Factors that discouraged early development in the Mount Vernon neighborhood specifically included the lack of reliable roads and the area's distance from the central residential core, then located to the south of Massachusetts Avenue.

In the early 19th century, settlement occurred primarily in the area of Georgetown, Capitol Hill, the Navy Yard, the White House, and F Street, N.W. In 1809, *An Act to Prevent Swine from Going At Large* was passed. This act designated Massachusetts Avenue as the southern

[4] Alison K. Hoagland, "The Carnegie Library: The City Beautiful Comes to Mt. Vernon Square," *Washington History*, volume 2, number 2, Fall/Winter 1990-1991. (Washington, D.C.: The Historical Society of Washington, D.C., 1990), p. 80.

[5] Hoagland, p. 80.

boundary beyond which pigs were allowed to roam.[6] Thus, with Massachusetts Avenue bisecting the Mount Vernon neighborhood, the area became firmly established at the northern limit of the city. By the 1830s, the area was known as the "Northern Liberties," a label commonly given to regions beyond the limits of the city.[7] Bounded approximately by 3rd, 15th, G, and O Streets, the Northern Liberties area of Washington, D.C. experienced virtually no development initially, save a few scattered wood frame dwellings surrounded by vast squares of open land.

With many streets little more than cow trails, development in the nation's capital was significantly hampered in the first quarter of the 19th century. Houses were so few and far between that the inhabitants found it necessary to identify their place of residence in directories not by house number or street but by the nearest public building – "a few paces from the Capitol," "near the president's house," "west of the War Office," "opposite the Treasury." As late as 1817, a cabinet officer gave his address to the *Congressional Directory* as "high ground north of Pennsylvania Avenue."[8]

Growth in the Northern Liberties was spurred by the creation of the 7th Street Turnpike. Chartered by Congress in 1810, the turnpike ran northward from Center Market on Pennsylvania Avenue to the District line, where it traveled west to Rockville, Maryland. Seventh Street, laid between 1818 and 1822, became the spine of the Northern Liberties, as well as a primary transportation artery into the center of the city. Development, primarily of a commercial nature, commenced at the southern end of 7th Street, and gradually spread northward toward Massachusetts Avenue.

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[6] Sue Kohler, "Massachusetts Avenue," in *The Grand American Avenue 1850-1920*, eds. Jan Cigliano and Sarah Bradford Landau (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1994), p. 178.

[7] The term "Northern Liberties" was used in similar communities in Philadelphia and Savannah, to name just two. James M. Goode, *Capital Losses*, (Washington, D.C.: The Smithsonian Institute, 1979), pp. 264-265; and Donald E. Jackson, "L'Enfant's Washington: An Architect's View," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, Volume 50 (Washington, D.C.: Columbia Historical Society, 1980), p. 410.

[8] Young, pp. 42-43.

Subdivision and Residential Improvements: 1840-1870

With the growing population of the city to the south of the Northern Liberties, migration northward was inevitable. To support the established residential and commercial areas, as well as future development to the north, the Northern Liberties Fire Company constructed a firehouse on the western portion of the as yet undeveloped Mount Vernon Square. The firehouse was erected in October 1840 between 8th and 9th Streets. To the east, President James K. Polk authorized the erection of the Northern Liberty Market in March 1846 on the eastern half of the square. The market became a focal point as development moved north of Massachusetts Avenue, assisting in the establishment of a commercial community and residential neighborhood. In fact, subsequent market structures erected in the area followed the commercial and residential development northward along 7th Street, culminating in the construction of the O Street Market in 1881.

A report prepared by General Montgomery C. Meigs in 1853 attests to the area's character prior to the Civil War, as well as the impact 7th Street had on development. An important designer in creating several of the city's post-Civil War architectural monuments, Meigs served with the Engineer Corps of United States Army. His report was prepared in preparation of a new municipal water system, which Congress funded with the largest outlay of funds for a single project since appropriations had been provided for the construction of the Capitol. Meigs was appointed chief engineer for the new water system, preparing a detailed report in 1853 on the development of the nation's capital and its future needs. His report documents that only two of the nine squares comprising the Mount Vernon Square neighborhood were improved. Fronting 7th Street, Squares 449 and 450 collectively contained fifty-seven houses and four stores. Development of the entire Mount Vernon area was limited to 7th Street with the greatest concentration of growth centered on Reservation 8 and the Northern Liberty Market.[9] Construction typically consisted of modest, two-story, wood-frame rowhouses with continuous side gable roofs and flat facades. These vernacular structures exhibited little applied ornament or detailing on their two-bay wide facades.

[9] The 1853 Meigs Survey can be found in the *Report of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia*, 1875.

Taking advantage of the inexpensive land prices, religious institutions moved into the area. The first church in the Mount Vernon Square area was Fletcher Chapel, at 4th Street and New York Avenue in Square 514. This building was built on the outskirts of the city between 1854 and 1857 as a mission chapel for the McKendree Methodist Episcopal Church (established 1845 on Massachusetts Avenue between 9th and 10th Streets). The small but active congregation attained independent status from the McKendree M.E. Church by 1868 with over eighty members, thus becoming known as the Fletcher Chapel. Although modest in size, the building was well sited and possesses a strong spiritual presence within the neighborhood. As such, the 1874 assessments on improvements noted the wood-frame church at $2,000, a value equal to neighboring masonry structures.

During the Civil War, Washington, D.C.'s daily life was interrupted by its duties as the supply and strategy center for the Union. Troop movements displaced everyday commerce and made physical improvements to the city's infrastructure difficult. Many public works projects, such as street paving which had begun in the 1840s and 1850s, came to a halt, as did most development of the city. In contrast to the lack of physical growth, Washington, D.C.'s population exploded with military personnel, government workers, and vast numbers of displaced African Americans who came from the ravaged south seeking refuge and work. The capital city experienced its greatest single population jump during the 1860s – almost seventy-five percent – creating severe housing shortages.

Despite a reduction in public works projects and the decreased funds for government construction, some improvements and major construction projects continued during the war years. The installation of streetcar rail lines along principal roads improved accessibility from the downtown core to the city's new "northern suburbs." In 1862, the Washington and Georgetown Railway Company installed three horse-drawn streetcar lines within the official boundaries of the nation's capital – along 14th Street from P Street to Florida Avenue, on 7th Street between the Potomac River and Florida Avenue, and along Pennsylvania Avenue from the Navy Yard to Georgetown. Two years later, the streetcar lines on 7th and 14th Streets were extended north past the official boundaries of the city at Florida Avenue. In Mount Vernon, as in many of Washington's newest neighborhoods, improvements in the city infrastructure followed the streetcar lines, with real estate values directly tied to a lot's proximity to the streetcar route.

This finally prompted construction east and west of 7th Street, particularly on the developing transportation arteries of New York Avenue, 4th Street, and M Street where migrating merchants and tradesmen could get housing near their commercial space. For example, Joseph Prather (415 M Street, 1866), and John Myers (440 M Street, 1869) – both butchers who maintained stalls at the Center and Northern Liberty Markets – built houses along M Street. Richard C. Lewis, a purveyor of gentleman's furnishings, built a house at 1211 4th Street in 1867, and grocer Theodore L. Bowen erected the adjacent dwelling at 1213 4th Street in the period between 1864-1869. The typical property owner built a house for himself and another for sale or rent, thus paving the way for speculative development of the neighborhood in the latter part of the 19th century.[10]

Interestingly, more buildings were initially constructed on the squares west of 7th Street, while those to the east remained sparsely improved, and development remained south of O Street.[11] To attract development, owners of the larger lots began to further subdivide their holdings into smaller and smaller parcels –, some of which had no access to the streets except through the alleyways. The greatest development was residential construction, particularly brick rowhouses erected on M Street, 4th Street, and New Jersey Avenue. During this period, construction in the alleys appears to have been limited to Ridge Street, with the erection of modest, two-story, wood frame rowhouses. The alley dwellings from this period were constructed primarily between 1855 and 1870.

Late 19th Century Development: 1870-1900

The Territorial Government and Municipal Building Codes

The greatest boost to the physical composition of the city and its lagging amenities occurred during the short-lived administration of the Territorial Government. In February 1871, Congress passed a bill establishing a new government for the District of Columbia that was composed of a

[10] Don't Tear It Down, "Lower Shaw/Mount Vernon East Survey Final Report," 1984, p. 4.
[11] Lloyd Van Derveer, *Map of the City of Washington, D.C.*, 1851.

legislative assembly, a five-member Board of Public Works, and a governor. Under Commissioner Alexander R. "Boss" Shepherd, the Board of Public Works began a massive program to modernize the city and improve the intolerable road conditions. The Board let contracts for laying public sewers and water mains, planting thousands of trees, and grading and paving streets. The $20,000,000 ultimately expended by the Board was intended to ensure that the City of Washington would remain the national capital.

Immediate and rapid improvements were targeted for the "center city," an area defined by the Mall on the south, P Street on the north, New Jersey Avenue on the east, and New Hampshire Avenue on the west. In addition, special consideration was paid to the improvement of certain thoroughfares in order to facilitate the transport of produce to the markets. Seventh Street in particular was graded and macadamized. Ninth and 11th Streets were graded and streetcar lines were installed. By 1874, sewer lines, gas mains, and water pipes were laid along 9th Street.

One of the first projects undertaken by the Board of Public Works was the enactment of new building codes. George Washington's original 1791 prohibition against wooden buildings had been eased in 1796 and, thus, wood-frame houses became dominant, in both type and number. The new 1872 building regulations still allowed wooden structures to be constructed within the city limits, though not within twenty-four feet of any house built of brick or other non-combustible material. Eventually, the construction of wooden buildings was forbidden within an area called the "fire limits," defined as the limits of the City of Washington and the southern part of Georgetown. Although existing wooden buildings were not demolished, the building regulations essentially required that after 1877 all new dwellings would be of brick and/or stone. This regulation had a dramatic influence on the architectural development of Washington, D.C., specifically such residential neighborhoods as Mount Vernon where rows of modest, wood-frame dwellings housed the middle class. Consequently, during the late 1870s and 1880s, rows of attached brick houses were built along the main public streets. These new brick rowhouses were built adjacent to and often replaced their wood frame predecessors, creating a second phase of architectural development in Mount Vernon. Larger and containing more architectural embellishments than the wood-frame houses, the brick buildings reflected contemporary architectural trends in residential design and featured elaborate cornices, metal, stone or molded brick window surrounds, and other applied ornamental elements.

The passage of the Building Projection Act in 1871 was equally formative in its impact on the physical form of buildings in Mount Vernon. The act allowed builders to erect projecting bays as much as four feet deep past the building line into the property at the front of the building, known as the parking area. Architecturally, the first bays were tentative in design, typically only one story in height, of wood construction, and appearing as if tacked onto existing flat fronted houses. Once generally accepted, the projecting bay became almost universally used in Washington rowhouse construction, and builders constructed larger bays that were better integrated into the body of the house.

Another major initiative of the Board of Public Works affecting Mount Vernon was its improvements to Washington, D.C.'s dilapidated older markets. In time, the Northern Liberty Market had become the "intolerable nuisance" that all such markets became before Washington's sewer system was created. In 1860, local citizens filed an unsuccessful petition seeking the removal of the unsanitary facilities. In 1867, the market was described in the following words:

> On market days the most offensive matter accumulates in the adjoining streets, greatly detrimental to the health of the residents of the neighborhood. The refuse vegetable matter thrown from the wagons of the hucksters, and the offal from the stall of the butcher, mingle with the filth created by the many animals which are brought and allowed to stand around the place, causing a most disagreeable stench, especially in the summer.[12]

It was not until 1872, however, that action was taken, as Shepherd notified vendors that the Northern Liberty Market was to be closed. When they refused to move, he had a large demolition crew raze the building at night; the falling debris accidentally killed two market workers. Shepherd's actions were highly controversial, and litigation went on for years.[13] After the demolition, some of the dealers formed the Northern Liberty Market Company and purchased

[12] George J. Olszewski, *Mount Vernon Square, Washington, D.C.* (National Park Service, Office of Historic Architecture Eastern Service Center, 1970), p. 7.

[13] Olszewski, p. 8.

"Savage Square" bounded by K, L, 5th and 6th Streets, just south of the Mount Vernon Square neighborhood in Square 483. James McGill, a prominent Washington, D.C. architect, designed the new Northern Liberty Market, which was completed in 1874. Distinguished by towers, dormers, and rich brickwork, the new market was touted as one of the most innovative structural achievements in Washington: the iron and steel truss roof spanned the full length and width of the building. While many Mount Vernon residents maintained stalls in the new market, it never achieved the anticipated success, as it was unable to defeat the draw of the established Center Market on Pennsylvania Avenue. Additionally, the market was to be too far from the major transportation artery of 7th Street.

For the remaining displaced vendors, Shepherd allocated space at 7th and O Streets (Square 422) for the site of a new market. As was his practice, Shepherd awarded the construction contracts to firms in which he owned large amounts of stock. With the discovery of his corrupt practices, Shepherd promptly abandoned his post. Consequently, many of the commissioner's improvements, whether in the planning stages or underway, were deserted. Construction of the new market structure in Mount Vernon was delayed until 1881. Commonly known as the O Street Market, the market is a rectangular, one-story brick building with a standing seam metal roof capped by a monitor. The dominant feature of the structure is a two-level square tower with a tall pyramidal roof. At the time of its construction, the nation's capital contained between six to eight markets. Recognized as a local landmark in 1968, the O Street Market stands today as one of only three extant 19th century public markets in the city.

With the removal of the Northern Liberty Market, the immediate future of Reservation 8 was uncertain; yet, for the surrounding community, the square was an essential element to its identity. Although not officially declared, years earlier Reservation 8 became known as Mount Vernon Square (or Place). The report of Brevet Brigadier General Nathaniel Michler of the Office of Public Buildings, Grounds, and Works appears to be one of the first documented sources to label the site as Mount Vernon Place.[14] This 1867 report included citywide recommendations for landscaping improvements, with particular attention paid to Reservation 8:

[14] The Office of Public Buildings, Grounds, and Works was the processor to the Board of Public Works.

> In planning the city, a large reservation, known as *Mount Vernon place*, was laid out at the intersections of K street north with New York and Massachusetts avenues. Most unfortunately for the ornament and health of that part of the city, the original design has not been perfected. Eighth street has not only been opened through it, separating it into two parts, but on one of these divisions has been erected a most unsightly building for a market house. The latter, with its attending annoyances, forms an intolerable nuisance, which should be abated at once.... By what authority the market is located on this public reservation cannot be ascertained. It [the market] should be removed, and arrangements similar to those in all our large cities be adopted to supply wants of the community. The grounds could then be improved and become what they were originally intended to be.[15]

Of course, no one ever knew for certain what the grounds were originally intended to be, save one of L'Enfant's public reservations devoted to the states of the Union. Thus, in an effort to provide a more direct route through the area, both Massachusetts and New York Avenues were subsequently extended through Mount Vernon Square. Asphalt carriage roads divided the square into several triangles. In spite of the bisecting roads, landscaping improvements were gradually carried out. In 1877, the District Board of Public Works constructed concrete roadways and planted lawns and shrubbery in the square. It also installed sidewalks, curbing, and an ornamental iron fountain on a mound at the center of the square. Despite these improvements, the conditions in the square were unpleasant and often dangerous. Its central mound proved to be the only safe point for pedestrians who sought to escape the wheels of rapidly passing carriages. Area property owners were displeased and signed a petition requesting the removal of the roadways and improvement of the park area. In 1882, this situation was addressed: the carriage roadways were closed and eventually removed, and in their place were gently curving footpaths surfaced with gravel. Drinking fountains and lampposts were installed, flowerbeds were planted, and the ornamental fountain was given a new coat of paint.[16] Park visitation

[15] Nathaniel Michler, "Appendix T," *Report of the Secretary of War*, p. 524.
[16] Olszewski, pp. 9-10.

increased as a result of these improvements and, in 1884, twenty-five new benches were placed along the walks.

With the loss of the Northern Liberty Market and the decline of its successor on Square 483, the surrounding community was deprived of its namesake. Fortunately, the new park setting of Mount Vernon Square provided the area with a nucleus from which to take its identity, thus the neighborhood to the north of K Street, along New York and Massachusetts Avenues was christened *Mount Vernon.* The name Northern Liberties continued to denote the community, however, in official documents such as city directories and maps until the late 1870s, when improvements to the landscaped square encouraged overwhelming acceptance of the sobriquet "Mount Vernon" for the surrounding neighborhood.

The Victorian Building Boom

Combined with a strong, rapidly growing national and local economy throughout much of the last quarter of the 19th century, Washington, D.C. experienced a tremendous residential building boom during the Victorian period. According to a survey by the Water Department, taken in October 1875, the boom had transformed the northern areas of the city, particularly Mount Vernon. Commercial activity remained limited to 7th Street, with twenty-eight of the thirty-six stores in the neighborhood within Squares 449 and 450. Residential construction had spread from Squares 449 and 450, fronting 7th Street, to include Square 514 along New York Avenue and Squares 513 and 523 on M Street. The survey documents the existence of over four hundred dwellings, the majority of which were constructed of brick rather than wood frame. The most improved residential area was found in the square bounded by 4th, 5th, M, and N Streets (Square 513). Containing over 130 residential buildings, the square was bisected by Ridge Street, one of the first alleys to be improved in the neighborhood. Square 449 retained the greatest number of wood-frame dwellings, as residential construction had commenced there prior to the Civil War. Masonry construction, as the building codes regulated, appeared throughout the area, with the greatest concentration within Square 513.

The almost uniform residential development pattern consisted of rows of buildings joined by party walls, with architectural emphasis placed only on the street-fronting facades. Builders took advantage of an economy of scale in building rows of identical houses, using mass-produced building elements. Fireplace mantels, windows, doors, interior woodwork, stair elements, gas light fixtures, and bathroom fixtures, as well as brackets, finials, molded bricks and cast iron stairs were all mass-produced elements that were purchased and pieced together by residential builders in infinite varieties. Often entire blocks of rowhouses were designed and constructed at the same time, typically with identical massing and architectural detailing whose repetition was offset by projecting or recessed bays, turrets, oriels, dormers, and applied ornamentation in wood, brick, stone and metal. Rows ranged from two houses to an entire block throughout the Mount Vernon neighborhood. Most of the buildings in the area were designed, and often financed, by small-scale speculative builders. Many of the investors were carpenters, masons, and other building craftsmen who evolved into developers, but frequently they interchanged among the roles of tradesman, hired builder, and equity-holding builder/developer.

Stylistically, rowhouses in the 1880s and 1890s in Washington, D.C. were inspired by eclectic, medieval sources, including the English Gothic and Queen Anne, Romanesque, and French Second Empire design motifs. Houses tended to be asymmetrical in form – emphasized by projecting and recessed bays – and constructed with a dark palette of red brick and brownstone, finished by wood and metal trim painted in somber tones. Architectural emphasis was placed on the fronts of the building, and sides of corner buildings; rear elevations were utilitarian, most often with ancillary ells. Although dwellings prior to 1875 were typically two stories in height, houses constructed in the late 1870s and 1880s, particularly along the public streets, tended to be three stories (sometimes two floors with a raised English basement). By the 1890s, houses in the area were more typically four full stories.

Commercial development, as seen along 7th Street at the time, mimicked the architectural trends illustrated on the surrounding residential buildings. The two-part commercial buildings had a single-story lower zone at street level that indicated public spaces. The upper floors were more private spaces, including residences, offices, hotel rooms, or meeting halls. The lower and upper zones were distinctly separated from one another by projecting cornices, transoms, and expansive window openings. The upper stories were heavily ornamented with applied detailing including

elongated window openings, hoods and lintels, paneled friezes, brackets, cornices, and parapets. The most ornate example of a commercial building displaying the fashionable architectural detailing typically found on residential buildings is 1015-1/2 7th Street in Square 450, constructed in 1888 for Isaac Levy and Son to the designs of architect John G. Meyers. The parapet crowning the highly detailed Italianate building, originally used as a paint store, documents the original owner and construction date.

As seen throughout Washington, D.C. during the latter part of the 19th century, the speculative ventures were financed by friends and relatives, in the case of small builders, and by neighborhood-based building and loan associations that lent more economically and freely and required no commission or bond against liens. In general, larger builders relied on traditional banks; these men frequently had the connections to find out where the government was planning road grading and sewer laying, permitting them to purchase land ahead of planned civic improvements. Partnerships, formed by builders, investors, relatives, and friends for the expressed purpose of development, were the norm. As time progressed, the building industry in Washington became increasingly divided between very large and very small construction businesses, both venturing into speculative building. During the 1870s, approximately 50% of all building in the city were built on speculation; by the mid-1880s, the percentage jumped to 75%.[17] For Mount Vernon, the paving of streets, the extension of streetcar lines, and improved amenities augmented the residential building boom. The development was characterized by the rapid subdivision of undeveloped squares and by infilling empty lots between existing structures. For example, to more fully utilize the property in Square 555, Kirby and Morgan Streets were opened, and almost completely improved by 1906 with the modest rowhouses of architect/developers, D. Carroll Diggs and Charles V. Trott, and the flats of architects, Appleton P. Clark and Osterman Bulter.

Examples of small speculative rows throughout Mount Vernon can be found at 1221-1231 4th Street (Square 523), constructed in 1870 by property owner/developer James G. Naylor. The row of six buildings, although not constructed at the same time, presents the appearance of unity and cohesiveness through form and ornamentation, a deliberate statement to identify the work of one

[17] "Greater U Street" National Register Nomination Application, (1998), Section 8, pp. 10-11.

developer. The structures at 1221-1227 4th Street were constructed of wood framing, while 1229 and 1231 4th Street were erected at a later date in masonry. The buildings are all two stories with two-bay wide facades connected by a continuous wooden cornice with modillions. Naylor was also responsible for the construction of the row of identical houses at 1129-1143 5th Street (Square 514) between 1878 and 1880. Again, the dwellings were two stories in height and two bays wide. The projecting canted bays of the first story visually unified the row, as did the mansard roof and front gabled dormers.

Diller B. Groff was another prominent Washington, D.C. developer who was personally responsible for designing small and large rows of speculative houses. Groff's work in the Mount Vernon Square neighborhood was limited to the dwellings at 1120-1128 6th Street, erected in 1881 on Square 449. Finished with pressed brick facades, the five two-story rowhouses are each two bays wide, consisting of a single entry opening and projecting canted bay pierced with window openings. The buildings, with the exception of 1120 6th Street, are identically ornamented with multi-light transoms, granite lintels, corbelled brick cornices, and metal crenellations.

The most prominent speculative development in the Mount Vernon Square neighborhood was undertaken by property owner Thomas Franklin Schneider, who served as architect, while the partnership of Darby and Davis constructed the buildings. Schneider (1858-1938) was a native of Washington, D.C., who worked at the age of 16 in the local architectural firm of Cluss and Schulze. At the time, Cluss and Schulze was a successful enterprise responsible for designing the Franklin School (1865-1869), the Smithsonian Arts and Industries Building (1876), and the Department of Agriculture Building (1867, demolished). In 1883, after eight years with the firm, Schneider established an independent practice at 929 F Street, N.W. Schneider's career was to take him into real estate speculation in addition to architecture, as he personally financed most of his own design work. In 1893, after ten years of private practice, Schneider published a book of photographs and fifteen renderings depicting his work to date. *Selections from Work of T.F. Schneider, Architect, Washington, D.C.* were supported by advertisements purchased by his subcontractors; the construction firm of Darby and Davis included. The publication included rowhouses on both sides of Q Street from 17th to 18th Streets, the Forest Inn at Forest Glen, Maryland, his own fifty-room house at 18th and Q Streets, and the soon to be constructed Cairo

Apartment Building. In the Mount Vernon Square neighborhood, Schneider's development was limited to Square 482, and encompassed the construction of fifty-three rowhouses in 1890 for an estimate cost of $250,000. The design included rows of three-story dwellings, all constructed of brick with limestone detailing. In an effort to create individuality for each dwelling, Schneider alternated each building's form and size, applied detailing, and opening configurations. Yet, some motifs were repeated to visually unify the rowhouses, almost to the point of indicating a single architect and developer conducted the work. Each dwelling was faced with pressed brick and lined by continuous molded brick stringcourses.

Tax assessments from the 1880s and 1890s indicate that new brick dwellings, such as those constructed by Naylor and Schneider, ranged greatly in value from $500 up to $15,000 in a few instances, while pre-1871 wood frame dwellings tended to be assessed from $100 to $1,500. According to newspaper advertisements in 1879-1880, the most expensive houses in the nation's capital fronted Lafayette Square ($65,000), while a mansion along Vermont Avenue just south of Logan Circle was listed for $16,000. In the Mount Vernon area, a brick rowhouse could cost anywhere from $1,000 to $7,000 depending on the size, location, and number of rooms.

Renting a house was common at all economic levels during this period. Costs varied greatly depending again on the building's size and location. As with sale prices, the area around the President's House was the most desirable and the most expensive. Yet, the Mount Vernon area was alluring for its convenient proximity to downtown, the streetcars, and the markets. The 1880 census does not indicate whether the occupants owned their dwellings, but the *Washington Star* reported in 1882 that most government clerks considered their employment to be so insecure that they were reluctant to buy houses, and therefore preferred to either rent or live in boarding houses. The Civil Service Act of 1883 enhanced the job security of federal employees, and thereby increased their ability to become homeowners in the Mount Vernon neighborhood.[18]

The influx of European immigrants and African Americans expanded the population of the city, and had an impact on the Mount Vernon neighborhood. Although the area remained a desirable residential community for the middle class well into the 20th century, Mount Vernon began to be

[18] Don't Tear It Down, "Lower Shaw/Mount Vernon East Survey Final Report," 1984, p. 5.

segregated by class and race after about 1875. For example, by 1880, the census records show that the majority of the occupants on Ridge Street, which was considered one of the better residential alleys, were African Americans. One-fifth of the residents on the alley were Irish immigrants, who, like their African American neighbors, held jobs as hucksters, laborers, and laundresses. Along public streets such as M Street, the residents were predominately white middle-class workers, who worked as government employees, small businessmen, tradesmen, skilled laborers, and professionals. Doctors, lawyers, and dentists who lived in the area tended to own their houses, using the first floor as office space and the second floor as living space – a common 19th century practice.[19]

Although a number of immigrants from Prussia and Ireland settled in the Mount Vernon Square neighborhood, the greatest number of residents came from other states in the Union, including New York, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Massachusetts, Vermont, Maryland, Nebraska, and Ohio. Whites born in the District of Columbia comprised the lowest percentage of residents in the neighborhood in 1880. The majority of African Americans inhabiting the Mount Vernon Square neighborhood were born in Maryland.[20]

Despite late 19th century growth in the community, the northeastern third of Square 555, along 1st Street between New York Avenue and N Street, remained undeveloped. The site was noted on the 1887 Hopkins maps as "Washington Garden" under the ownership of Elsa Loeffler. The western portion of the square, east of Kirby Street, would serve in the 1880s as the site of George Herwein's brewery and from the early 1890s to the 1940s as the National Homeopathic Hospital. With the removal of the hospital, the property was linked with the remaining undeveloped property to the east to form a city park and playground. To date, the site remains undeveloped.

With the growth of the city's African American population, the Mount Vernon Square neighborhood became host to many important African American religious and educational institutions. Important late 19th century African American churches included Gethsemane Baptist Church, which stood at the intersection of Ridge and 5th Streets, the 1894 People's

[19] United States Census Records, 1880.
[20] United States Census Records, 1880.

Congregational Church on M Street between 6th and 7th Streets, and the Galbraith A.M.E. Zion Church. Galbraith Church was founded in 1843 in Southwest Washington, D.C. and was reorganized in 1852 by Reverend Dyson, who built a chapel on L Street between 4th and 5th Streets. In 1884, Dyson moved the congregation to its present location at 1114-1116th Street between L and M Streets (Square 449). The congregation occupied a Gothic Revival style chapel constructed on the site in 1872 by the Evangelical Association. By 1924, a new stuccoed masonry building was erected on the site to replace the 1872 structure. Illustrating its importance as a city institution, by the mid-20th century, Galbraith drew its membership from outside the neighborhood, and continued to be active well into the latter part of the century.[21]

Within the boundaries of the Mount Vernon Square neighborhood, few public schools or educational facilities existed; thus neighboring institutions played important roles in the social life of the entire community. Illustrating the racially mixed nature of the area, the number of elementary schools designated for African American children nearly equaled that of schools for whites until the elimination of segregation in 1954.[22] The Abbott School stood at the intersection of New York Avenue and 5th Street in Square 482S. Built as a white grammar school in 1875, it was active until it closed in 1934. It was later demolished, and a police station was built on the site. African American students initially attended the 1880 circa Banneker Colored School in Square 526 south of New York Avenue. With the growth of the Greater U Street area, more African American schools were erected to the north – Garnet School (1880) and Patterson School (1893) at 10th and U Streets.

Unlike the elementary schools that served the communities in which they were located, the high schools drew their enrollment from the entire city; students attended them according to their interest in the curricula offered: academic, business, science, or manual training. The nation's premier African American high school was located at New York Avenue and M Street in Square 556. Known as the M Street High School, the institution played a significant role in the development of African American education in the United States as the first permanent home of the first African American high school in the country. The M Street School had its origins in the

[21] Don't Tear It Down, "Lower Shaw/Mount Vernon East Survey Final Report," 1984, p. 8.
[22] Don't Tear It Down, "Lower Shaw/Mount Vernon East Survey Final Report," 1984, p. 8.

Negro Preparatory School, established in 1870 to teach future African American teachers. In 1891, the school moved into the newly constructed M Street building, just south of the Mount Vernon Square Historic District. By 1896, however, the school was plagued by serious overcrowding, a condition that was somewhat relieved by the construction of Dunbar High School on the west side of 1st Street, between O and N Street in 1916. Now known as the Perry School, the M Street High School was recognized as a National Historic Landmark in 1986.

One square north of the Mount Vernon Square boundaries, in Square 554, stands the Armstrong Technical High School. Authorized by Congress in the late 1890s, Armstrong Manual Training School was established for any African American student desiring a secondary education. The building was opened in 1902, and a number of exceptional African American educators were trained there: Garnet C. Wilkinson, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, Arthur C. Newman, and Dr. Benetta B. Washington. The 28-room building was designed to house 300 students. By the 1950s, after three additions, Armstrong accommodated nearly 1,300. In 1964, it was designated an adult education center. The building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1996.

Twentieth Century Development: 1900-1940

As the residential building stock of the neighborhood had been almost fully developed by the turn of the 20th century with single-family dwellings, developers and builders focused their attention on the construction of apartment buildings and commercial structures. Of the limited residential buildings constructed during this period, the majority were multi-family dwellings, particularly apartment buildings and flats. In 1902, the first apartment building was constructed in the Mount Vernon Square neighborhood at 115 New York Avenue to the designs of architect Julius Wenig. Appropriately named New York Apartments, the building was reminiscent of the Romanesque Revival style with rows of arched openings and intricate brickwork. Other noteworthy apartment buildings included Ridge Apartments on Ridge Street in Square 513 (1904), the La Corona at 425 M Street in Square 513 (1907), and the Mohawk at 426 M Street in Square 514 (1913). Like the neighborhing commercial buildings, the apartments were more imposing in size than the single-family dwellings. Each reflected the popular architectural fashions of the period, most commonly revival styles, with projecting bays, heavy lintels, and

projecting cornices. The apartment buildings, while predominately of masonry construction, introduced the lighter more subdued tones of yellow and buff brick to present a contrast to the dark red brick of the surrounding community.

As automotive travel became more prevalent in the early 20th century, 7th Street and New York Avenue became principal commuter routes. Corridors of commerce cut through Mount Vernon and were lined with gas stations, automobile garages, stores, laundries, and warehouses. One of the more prominent commercial buildings in the Mount Vernon neighborhood was the Yale Steam Laundry at 437 New York Avenue in Square 514. Developing into one of the largest commercial laundries in the District of Columbia, Yale Steam Laundry was established in 1885 by former postal workers Frank H. Walker and Frank E. Smith. With the growth of the city, and the industry itself, the laundry company maintained numerous cleaning facilities and storefront locations throughout northwest Washington. The third, and final, cleaning facility associated with the laundry company, the Yale Steam Laundry Building on New York Avenue, was constructed in 1902 to the designs of local architect Thomas Francis, Jr. Despite its massive size and internal function, the building's design revived the early 19th century classical elements. This conscious choice to present a commercial facility, which on the interior reflected the technological advances of the 20th century, was in keeping with the architectural principles of the period. The eclectic stylistic expressions of the period manifested themselves best in low-rise commercial/industrial buildings desiring to respect the past and promote a solid and respectable public image, while fitting into the extant residential neighborhood of Mount Vernon.

The most notable non-residential buildings in the Mount Vernon neighborhood dating from the early part of the 20th century is the Central Library of the District of Columbia at 800 Mount Vernon Place. Erected between 1900-1903, the building's construction was funded by steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. As one of the most ornate and lavish of the Carnegie-funded libraries, the Washington Central Library served as a model for numerous Carnegie libraries across the country. The first structure erected specifically for the D.C. Public Library, the Carnegie Library served the city for nearly seventy years as a public library. Like the Northern Liberty market that once stood on the same square, the library building became the focal point of the surrounding Mount Vernon community, despite initial opposition from the *Washington Post* to its erection within the open public park at Mount Vernon Square:

> ...immovably opposed to the breach of trust involved in diverting the city's parks from public use as such, and covering them with bricks and mortar. This sentiment of course dominates every thoughtful Washingtonian. Once assent to the theory that these public spaces may properly be utilized in this way, and never will another public building site be purchased in Washington. The reservations will be cut up and parcelled out...[23]

Owned by the United States government, the use of the vacant square was actually embraced by city officials, Congress, and the neighboring public as it would not violate any principle or create a dangerous precedent. McMillan's committee report showed sensitivity to the vistas enjoyed by the site as envisioned in the L'Enfant plan:

> Situated in the center of Mount Vernon Square, the view of the building would be obtained from Massachusetts Avenue, K Street and New York Avenue, and would add dignity and beauty to a portion of the city where ornamentation is somewhat lacking.[24]

Consequently, a bill was passed and signed by President McKinley on March 3, 1899, just two months after Carnegie had promised to provide the funding for the building's construction.[25] On July 18, 1899, the firm of Ackerman and Ross was selected among more than twenty-five entries. The New York firm, in existence from about 1897 to 1902, included principals William S. Ackerman and Albert Randolph Ross. With no established stylistic design guidelines, Ackerman and Ross drew upon the Beaux-Arts traditions for the siting of the new Washington Public Library. Their design was in keeping with contemporary national architectural trends expressed at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. This architectural style featured prominent entryways with monumental arches; stone exterior walls with exaggerated horizontal coursed lines; and the hallmark Beaux-Arts details such as lavishly ornate keystones, paired

[23] Hoagland, p. 79
[24] Hoagland, p. 81.
[25] U.S. Statutes at Large 30 (1899), pp. 1372-1373

columns, pilasters, floral swags, shields, and escutcheons. The library's cornerstone was laid on April 24, 1901, and the building was completed in December 1902, nine months after the completion date established by the 1899 legislation.

In the second quarter of the 20th century, demographic shifts can be seen in the residential patterns of the Mount Vernon community. The development of residential suburbs outside the city center marked the beginning of a gradual white middle-class exodus from formerly integrated urban neighborhoods throughout Washington, D.C. However, in the Mount Vernon neighborhood, African Americans, rather than whites, undertook the migration. With the regulations over alley dwellings and the emergence of the Greater U Street neighborhood as Washington's premier African American community, all classes of African Americans began to move to the surrounding sections of the city, specifically LeDroit Park, Strivers Section, Brookland, and Cardozo. Accordingly, by 1920, the number and economic diversity of African American residents had decreased markedly in the area. The area remained home to many white residents who worked for the government or in the growing commercial downtown area.

Despite this, many of the religious institutions in the Mount Vernon Square neighborhood became African-American, as congregations moved into formerly white churches and constructed new church buildings. In 1908, Fletcher Chapel sold their small frame church to the African American congregation of the Church of God and Saints of Christ, which still occupies the building. The Church of God on 4th Street built its structure in 1926 on the corner of 3rd Street and New Jersey Avenue. Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church at New Jersey Avenue and Morgan Street changed hands to the African American Israel C.M.E. Church in 1940. The final religious conversion took place in 1968 when the New Birth Baptist Church acquired the Italian Baptist Church on Kirby Street. In addition, seven new churches were built for African-American congregations. Thus, by the middle part of the 20th century, all the churches in the Mount Vernon area had African American congregations.[26]

[26] Don't Tear It Down, "Lower Shaw/Mount Vernon East Survey Final Report," 1984, p. 15.

Desegregation and its Influences on the Mount Vernon Neighborhood: 1940-Present

The racial conversion of churches in this district was the result of a second migration phase that had occurred in the 1930s and 1940s. The population surge during World War II, as well as the racially restrictive covenants enforcing segregation through the city, prompted this migration. Since the latter part of the 19th century, covenants were used to restrict ownership and/or occupancy of a property, and were typically drawn up by land companies, developers, homeowner groups, and citizens' associations, ostensibly to protect property values. In 1926, the Supreme Court upheld the use of racial covenants in *Corrigan v. Buckley*, letting a decision of the DC Court of Appeals stand. The Court of Appeals had found that "the constitutional right of a Negro to acquire, own, and occupy property does not carry with it the constitutional power to compel [the] sale and conveyance to him of any particular private property."[27] The case was reflective of the legalization of segregation by the courts that stood until after the Second World War. Thus, the number of residential neighborhoods open to African Americans was limited to older communities such as Mount Vernon.

In 1948, however, the Supreme Court reversed its previous rulings, finding the covenants violated the Federal Civil Rights Act, and would be contrary to the public policy of the United States. While not immediate, the court's refusal to uphold racial covenants had a dramatic impact on the racial geography of Washington. Legally, African Americans were now free to buy anywhere in the city, and flight from the older neighborhoods to outlying suburbs was no longer restricted to whites. Consequently, by the 1950s, the aging housing stock of Mount Vernon and its surrounding neighborhoods was no longer deemed desirable to the middle classes of any race or nationality. Dwellings were increasingly leased, rather than owner-occupied, and many of the single-family residences were divided into apartments and rooming houses for a more transient population. Increased density, overcrowding, and poverty began to plague the once middle-class area.

[27] Mara Cherkasky, "For Sale to Colored," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, Volume 8, Number 2 (Washington, D.C.: Columbia Historical Society, Fall/Winter 1996-1997), pp. 40-57.

In 1966, the Mount Vernon community was targeted as part of the larger Shaw urban renewal zone, and federal funds for the area's redevelopment were made available. The Shaw area, never before thought of as a single cohesive neighborhood, was bounded by Massachusetts Avenue to K Street, 14th Street, Florida Avenue, and the railroad tracks leading north from Union Station.[28] Unlike the Southwest urban renewal, the neighborhood had a voice in the effort, under the leadership of Reverend Walter Fauntroy, who created the Model Inner City Community Organization as a vehicle for citizen participation. The planned incentives were interrupted, however, when destructive riots followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in April 1968. The resulting devastation affected much of the social and economic infrastructure of Shaw, with 7th Street at the center of the looting and burning of buildings. Already in place, the federal funding provided within the urban renewal program aided in the rebuilding of the community. The City Council's May 1968 report, entitled *Rebuilding and Recovery of Washington, D.C. from the Civil Disturbances of April 1968* recognized the need to provide additional "short-term aid and long-term redevelopment" particularly to the area north of Mount Vernon Square between 6th and 9th Streets. Following the initiatives and plan of the National Capital Planning Commission, and the articulation of the community development objectives, the Redevelopment Land Agency worked in close coordination with the departments of the District government to improve living conditions. Ultimately, new housing developments with a substantial number of dwelling units were completed by 1976, and the rehabilitation of existing units was underway. Seventh Street, in particular, was greatly improved with mini-parks and new street lighting. In recent years, the opening of the Metro's Green Line and the present construction of the Convention Center have encouraged the economic growth and vitality of the area. The erection of new buildings on vacant lots, the multi-million dollar restorations, modest rehabilitations, and landmark designation of historic buildings such as the Yale Steam Laundry, the O Street Market, and the Carnegie Library have made great strides in rejuvenating the 7th Street corridor, Mount Vernon Square (Reservation 8), and the greater Mount Vernon neighborhood.

[28] The area was named Shaw after a local junior high school that was named in honor of Civil War Colonel Robert Gould Shaw.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The Mount Vernon Square Historic District begins at the intersection of 7th Street and New York Avenue, NW. The boundary runs northeast on New York Avenue, including all the properties fronting the avenue to the north, and turns north on 1st Street. Running one block north on 1st Street, the boundary turns west on N Street to include all properties on the south side of the street. The district boundary turns south on 5th Street to its intersection with M Street, where it turns west. At Square 449, the boundary extends west to include those properties fronting 6th Street between L and M Street, excluding the housing project occupying the western half of the square. Along L Street, the boundary travels west to 7th Street, where it turns south to the point of beginning at New York Avenue. Squares included in whole or part in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District are: 449, 450, 482, S482, 513, 514, 523, 524, and 555.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the proposed historic district are comprised of a portion of the much larger community that grew around Mount Vernon Square. Drastic physical changes in the latter part of the 20th century have created two distinct neighborhoods, Mount Vernon Square and Mount Vernon West/Blagden Alley. Collectively, Mount Vernon was historically known as the Northern Liberties, bounded approximately by 3rd, 15th, G, and O Streets.

Seventh Street and its evolution as a primary commercial and transportation corridor for the city of Washington is essential in the understanding of the Mount Vernon area. The proposed historic district boundary is limited to those properties on the west side 7th Street between K and N Streets. The recent demolition of historic resources and construction of the new D.C. Convention Center on the west side of the street in Squares 400, 401, 402, 424, 425, and 426 warrants the exclusion of these squares from the district boundaries. This area is bounded by N Street to the north, 9th Street to the west, 7th Street to the east, and K Street to the south, and includes 8th Street. Thus, the historic district boundary for Mount Vernon Square Historic District travels north on 7th to L Street from New York Avenue. At its intersection with L Street, the boundary turns east, to exclude the 1980s Bishop Walter McCollough, Sr. Court Housing

Project in Square 449. Further north, additional housing projects from the 1960s-1980s preclude the inclusion of other squares fronting 6th and 7th Streets.

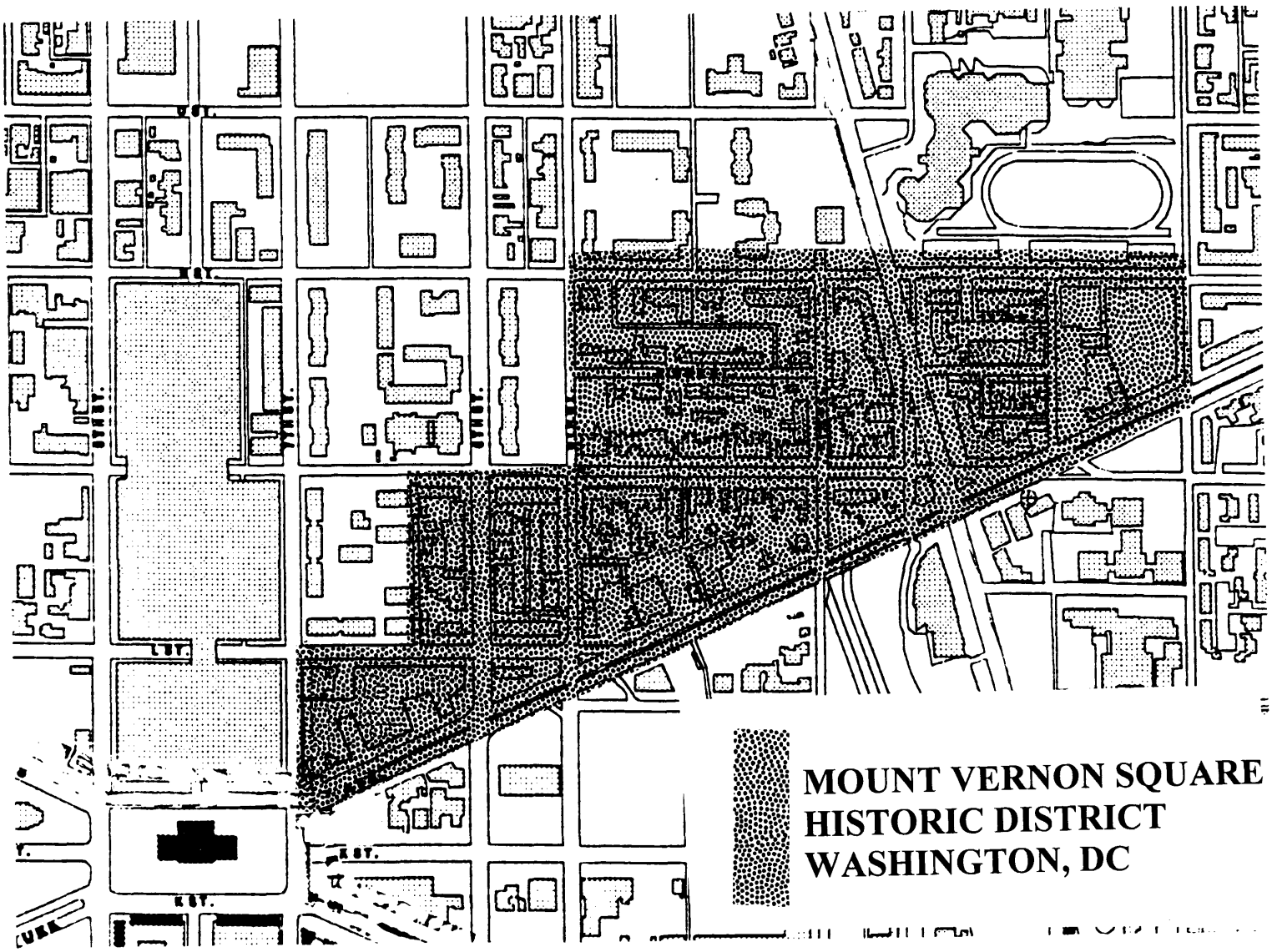
Running northeast to southwest, New York Avenue serves as the southern boundary. The avenue, laid out by L'Enfant in 1791, is a major transportation corridor into the capital, and a visual boundary. The neighborhood to the south of New York Avenue has experienced sufficient demolition, new construction, vacant lots, and the loss of integrity of remaining resources.

On the east, 1st Street is the boundary for the proposed district. The street is one block west of North Capitol Street, the dividing line between northwest and northeast Washington, D.C. The neighborhood between 1st and North Capitol Streets is not contemporaneous with that of the proposed historic district. The impact of 7th Street did not extend this far east, thus North Capitol Street and the extension of the streetcar lines in the last decade of the 19th century played a greater role in the development of the neighborhood.

The northern boundary of the proposed historic district has been determined by the 1968 redevelopment initiatives of the Shaw Urban Renewal Project and the recent redevelopment of the 7th Street corridor north of M Street. This has resulted in the demolition of historic fabric and the construction of commercial buildings, low-rise apartment housing, and the 1975 Dunbar High School.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
Continuation Sheet

Mount Vernon Square Historic District, Washington, DC

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