
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
Historic Landmark Designation Case No. 10-20

The Samuel F. and Harriet America Burrows House
4624 Verplanck Place, NW (Square 1555, Lot 34)

Meeting Date: March 24, 2011
Applicant: The Tenleytown Historical Society
Owner: Bryan and Adina Kanefield
Affected ANC: ANC 3E
Staff Reviewer: Kim Prothro Williams

After careful consideration, staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Review Board designate the Samuel and Harriet Burrows House at 4624 Verplanck Place, NW under the Multiple Property Document *American University Park: Its Early Houses, Pre-Civil War to 1911*. It is further recommended that the application be forwarded to the National Park Service for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The Samuel and Harriet Burrows House is a rare surviving example of a pre-Civil War farmhouse now located in the suburban American University Park neighborhood of northwest Washington.



History and Architecture

The Samuel and Harriet America Burrows house on Verplanck Place is a two-story, three-bay, frame farmhouse with Italianate detailing, including long, narrow windows on the first story and a bracketed cornice at the roofline. Constructed *circa* 1850, the house is one of four in the American University Park neighborhood known to have existed before the area was platted for residential subdivision. It was originally located off River Road near Ellicott Street on Burrows family land, a portion of which was taken during the Civil War for construction of Fort Bayard at the intersection of River Road and Western Avenue. During the war, the Burrows family, although Southern sympathizers, offered hospitality to soldiers and even to President Lincoln. In 1896 Samuel Burrows, then aged 70 years, sold much of the family acreage, but not his own farm, to the developers of American University Park. His widow, Harriet America Burrows, continued to live

in the house until her death in 1923. Following her death, the house and surrounding farmland were sold, and in 1928, the house was moved to its present location on Verplanck Place (originally named Tenley Place).

The land that became American University Park had been farmed by the Burrows family for at least 50 years prior to its subdivision in 1896. In 1857, Samuel Burrows added to his property holdings in the area when he purchased the William Phillips farm, shown on the 1861 Boschke map just south of the Burrows land. He and his wife Harriet purportedly rebuilt the farmhouse and had been living in it just a few years when the Civil War broke out. In addition to a large installation at Fort Reno, a smaller fortification, Fort Bayard, was built at the intersection of River Road and Western Avenue. Fifty acres of Burrows land was used for barracks, camp grounds and parade grounds.

Although Southern sympathizers, the Burrows graciously offered the Union soldiers provisions and goods, warranting an official testimonial dated May 23, 1863 and signed by Lieut. R.C. Worthington, thanking the Burrows “for the many kindnesses and hospitalities we have received from Mr. Samuel and wife near Fort Bayard – since our first arrival at that place.... and which they were always willing and ready to bestow.”

In addition to Union troops, the Burrows hosted President Lincoln on at least one occasion during when the president had come to visit the troops at the fort. A family story relates that one of the Burrows’ young children was not happy to see the president and said so, to which the president reportedly responded that he did not want to distress her and would not come again. This hints at the views of the president that may have been expressed privately within the home.

Following the Civil War, the Burrows family continued to farm their many acres. Samuel Burrows had a dairy herd as did several of his neighbors. One year before his death Samuel Burrows sold 70 acres of his land (exclusive of his farmhouse and associated acreage) to H. Lloyd Irvine, who in turn sold it to the developers of American University Park. Harriet remained on the farm for 25 years after her husband’s death. She continued to buy and sell property in the Tenleytown area, demonstrating a keen business sense shared by other widowed Tenleytown property owners such as Arianna Lyles of the Rest and Anastasia Patten of Dunblane.

Five years after Harriet’s 1923 death, her house was moved approximately nine blocks south to its present location on Verplanck Street. At the time of its move, the surrounding lots were unimproved, yet ripe for development. In the mid 1930s the street was filled with two-story, three-bay, brick Colonials surrounding the farmhouse.

Evaluation

The Samuel and Harriet America Burrows House meets National Register Criteria A (*Events*) and C (*Architecture*) and D.C. Criteria B (*History*) and D (*Architecture and Urbanism*) for designation in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites for the following reasons:

- *History*: The property is associated with historical periods and patterns of growth that contributed significantly to the heritage, culture and development of the District of Columbia. In particular, the Burrows house has direct associations with the Civil War, the establishment of Civil War forts and the stationing of Union troops on the outskirts of the federal city. The Burrows farmhouse, located on land adjacent to Fort Bayard, provided provisions to the Union troops and was visited by President Lincoln.

The property illustrates an early phase of development of the larger Tenleytown area as it grew from a rural community in the pre-Civil War era to a twentieth-century residential neighborhood. The Burrows house provides an excellent example of a rare pre-Civil War farmhouse that survived the subdivision of agricultural land into American University Park in the late nineteenth century and its principal and subsequent development during the 1930s as a middle-class residential suburb of the city.

- *Architecture and Urbanism:* The property embodies the distinguishing characteristics of architectural styles, building types, and methods of construction, and is an expression of siting and design significant to the appearance and development of the District of Columbia. In particular, the Burrows house provides an excellent and rare surviving example of a mid-nineteenth-century vernacular farmhouse that historically dotted the countryside beyond the original city limits. It also illustrates an example of such a house re-purposed, relocated and expanded as a suburban dwelling.

The Period of Significance extends from *circa* 1850 when the house was originally built to 1961, a date fifty years from the present. Although moved from its original location, the Burrows house has stood on its current site for 83 years. The property has been carefully maintained by a succession of owners, and it retains sufficient integrity to convey the values and qualities for which it is judged significant.