
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 21-11

Mt. Vernon Triangle Historic District (Amendment)

917, 919, and 921 6th Street NW and 504, 506 and 508 K Street NW
Square 484, Lots 29, 811, 812 and 813

Meeting Date: June 24, 2021
Applicant: DC Preservation League
Affected ANC: 6E

The Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District amendment consists of a boundary increase and expanded period of significance for the historic district. The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board approve the amendment as an update to the Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District, already listed in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites. If approved, the Historic Preservation Office intends to forward the nomination to the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C and Criteria Considerations B and E for moved and reconstructed buildings and with a period of significance of 1855-1946.

Preservation Background

In 2005, the Historic Preservation Office undertook and prepared a National Register Multiple Property document (MPD) on the Mount Vernon Triangle area between Mount Vernon Square and New Jersey Avenue on the west and east, and Massachusetts and New York avenues on the south and north. The *Mount Vernon Triangle, Architectural and Historic Resources, Washington, D.C., 1791-1946* MPD provided historic context on the area's physical and social growth, and it identified associated property types relevant to the area's development. The project grew out of the Mount Vernon Triangle planning initiative launched in 2003 by multiple DC agencies and property owners, seeking to create a vibrant and distinctive mixed-use intown neighborhood.

Under this cover document, the DC Preservation League (DCPL) prepared a historic district application for the collection of buildings around 4th, 5th, I and K Streets NW (Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District), and it prepared landmark applications on several other buildings associated with the historical and physical patterns of development within the boundaries of the Mount Vernon Triangle area. Three of the nominations were taken to the Board for evaluation: the historic district nomination, a landmark nomination for the three rowhouses at 917, 919 and 921 6th Street, and a landmark application for the Emily Wiley House at 301 I Street NW.

As part of this process, the Board designated the Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District—a cohesive collection of 24 buildings and an archaeological site—recognizing it as a significant remnant and a microcosm of the racially and culturally diverse, working-class merchant community whose livelihoods depended upon the commercial activity of Seventh Street and the Northern Liberties Market. The Board also designated the Emily Wiley House at 301 I Street

NW under the MPD as a good example of an Italianate-style urban town house, built ca. 1867 and for its early 20th century associations with the Italian immigrant community as the parish house to Holy Rosary Church, and home to an Italian immigrant family and to the “Liberty Meat Market” housed in the building’s rear wing. The Board denied landmark designation to the three buildings at 917, 919 and 921 6th Street. Although adjacent to the proposed historic district, the buildings were not included within the bounds as they were “visually distinct and physically removed” from it, and the Board determined that the buildings did not meet the criteria for landmark designation on their own merits (see HPO Report for 917, 919 and 921 6th Street NW for further discussion).

Relocated Buildings

At the time that these cases were being brought to the Board, DCPL submitted landmark applications on several buildings located on a large development site in the 600 block of K Street and New York Avenue NW. Subsequent consultation with DC HPO and the owner/developer of the properties led to a legal agreement between DCPL and the owner/developer, resulting in the retention and incorporation of four historic buildings along the 600 block of K Street into a new building, completed in 2015.¹ Two other single-story buildings, the Hodges Sandwich Shop (formerly at 616 New York Avenue NW) and the Riteway Auto Top Shop (formerly at 607-09 K Street NW) did not fit into the project, and were moved temporarily to an adjacent site owned by the developer.

When this second site was ready for development by 2018, DCPL again consulted with DC HPO and the owner/developer about disposition of the two temporarily moved buildings and a third structure on the site, the Lord Baltimore Filling Station No. 12 (then at its original location on the northwest corner of 6th and K streets NW, and considered eligible for designation). These consultations took place after the developer had already purchased a former used car lot diagonally across the intersection at the southeast corner of 6th and K streets NW. The developer envisioned this third site as a potential location to reconstruct the Waffle Shop, a historic landmark built at 522 10th Street NW, and dismantled pursuant to an agreement with DCPL and other preservation groups. The agreement obligated the developer to complete the reconstruction on an appropriate site using any salvaged historic materials. Several other possible sites had been discussed by then, but none were suitable enough to pursue.

During consultation, a consensus emerged that the Hodges Sandwich Shop could be sensitively relocated on the third site, but that the larger Riteway Shop was not sufficiently distinguished to warrant extraordinary preservation efforts. Multiple options were considered for preserving the one-story Lord Baltimore Filling Station *in situ*, incorporated into the development of the proposed 11-story office building. After concluding that none of the design options provided a compatible setting for the diminutive filling station, the SHPO recommended relocating it across the intersection, where it could be restored in a context comparable to its historic setting.

While building relocation is not a recommended preservation treatment, HPRB has approved such moves on rare occasions as a last-resort preservation measure. In this case, important

¹ The retained buildings include the Hartig Motor Company building façade (formerly at 627 K Street, moved slightly east on its site); two Victorian-era dwellings (formerly 617 K Street and 611 K Street) and a two-story, early 20th century commercial building (formerly 613 K Street).

considerations included the extended collaboration between preservationists and the developer, the opportunity to site the relocated structures in an orientation and setting similar to their original context, and DC HPO's long involvement in the effort to retain historic structures that would enhance the character of the new Mount Vernon Triangle community. Upon completion of their move, the buildings were rehabilitated according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, with fully restored facades.

Proposed Amendment

The amendment proposes to increase the boundaries of the Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District and expand its period of significance under National Register Criteria A and C. The proposed boundaries would extend one-half block west to 6th and K Streets NW to encompass six additional buildings: the two moved and renovated historic buildings from the 600 blocks of K Street and New York Avenue; the group of three nineteenth-century houses which remain *in situ* at 917, 919, and 921 6th Street; and the reconstructed Waffle Shop. The expanded district would also include a two-story brick wing connecting 921 6th Street NW to the moved buildings.

As proposed, the period of significance would increase from its 1875-1946 period to a more expansive one of 1855 to 1970. As explained in the nomination, the beginning date reflects the date of construction of the wood frame house encased within a later 1886 brick addition at 919 6th Street, which was then owned and occupied by a free Black family, to 1970,² which marks the conversion of the Hebreu Heating Company Office to the Hodges Sandwich Shop and the beginning of the neighborhood's economic decline and demolition of structures in surrounding blocks.

History and Architecture

The amended nomination provides a thoroughly researched and extensive history of the individual properties to be added to the Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District. The nomination illustrates how these properties collectively broaden, enhance, and contribute to our understanding of the Mount Vernon Triangle area as a notable working-class neighborhood that was part of, and/or depended upon the commercial activity of the 7th Street corridor and Northern Liberties Market as it evolved from the pre-Civil War era until the mid-20th century. The properties further enhance our knowledge of the social and cultural history of the neighborhood whose residents, including African Americans and members of the German immigrant community, represented a diversity of backgrounds.

These individual histories are well presented in the nomination and will not be re-iterated in this staff report; rather certain aspects of those histories will be highlighted as they specifically relate to the significance of Mount Vernon Triangle. To start, the group of three dwellings which remain *in situ* at 917, 919 and 921 6th Street are directly associated with the socio-economic forces of growth that created Mount Vernon Triangle as an entrepreneurial, working-class neighborhood whose residents of mixed races included a sizeable German immigrant population, many associated with the merchant community. The three-story Victorian brick dwelling at 917 6th Street NW, was constructed in 1895 by Louis P. Krey, the son of German immigrants and an

² Although the end date is established as 1970, the narrative indicates that Hodges Sandwich Shop moved into the building in 1967. The discrepancy is unexplained, but it appears to be an approximation of the beginning of economic decline and demolition.

established businessman, on the eve of his marriage. Krey had moved to the area around 1887 when he was a partner in a nearby furniture store; four years later, Krey left the furniture business for the food industry and established Krey, Price & Company, a wholesale poultry partnership, near Center Market. With the city's increasing population and food needs, the wholesale poultry industry was thriving, enabling Krey to build his solid brick dwelling convenient to the 7th Street retail corridor and just north of his wholesale business across from Center Market. As his success in business continued in the early 20th century, Krey took on leadership roles in various business-related and charitable organizations, remaining with his family, including a wife and three children, at 917 6th Street until his death in 1920.

The history of the dwelling at 921 6th Street is similarly associated with the area's German immigrant and merchant community. Elizabeth Killian, of German descent and a successful milliner and business owner, built the three-story brick Victorian on 6th Street in 1886. She commissioned the house shortly after the death of her husband, John Killian, who operated a restaurant at 1208 F Street NW, in the same building where the couple and their family resided, along with several boarders. Upon the death of her husband, Killian decided to leave downtown for Mount Vernon Triangle and its German community. As designed and specified by Elizabeth Killian, her new house was built to accommodate boarders, and for almost thirty years she would operate it as a rooming house where many of her tenants were members of the German community.

While the histories of 917 and 921 6th Street and their associations with the German community closely align with the known trends of development in Mount Vernon Triangle, the history of the dwelling at 919 6th provides important new insight into the cultural and physical development of the area. In 1855, at a time when the neighborhood east of the Northern Liberties Market at Mount Vernon Square was sparsely built up of mostly modest frame dwellings, free Black Washingtonian and laborer Arnold Somerville and his wife purchased (and maybe built) a modest two-story wood frame dwelling on 6th Street where they headed their family of three children. The Somerville family, who counted themselves among the small percentage of pre-Civil War, free-Black property owners, lived adjacent to both African American and German immigrant neighbors in those early years.

Following Arnold Somerville's death in 1867, the house descended to his children and would remain in the family until 1916. In 1886, Elizabeth (Somerville) Thomas and her husband, Charles Thomas, improved the family dwelling by raising the two-story house to three stories and adding a new brick façade, essentially encasing the older frame house within a new brick one, though the wood structure remains visible at the rear of the dwelling. This substantial upgrade to the pre-Civil War dwelling, along with a review of the family's professions—waiter, seamstress, school teacher—reveal that the family's free Black status and ability to own property before the Civil War helped propel them after the war into the ranks of the middle-class.

The existing Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District designation recognizes that the area historically supported a racially and ethnically mixed residential population; however, its documentation concludes that as a general rule, white residents lived on the street-fronting properties while African Americans resided within the alleyways. The history of the Somerville house at 917 6th Street, documented in the amended nomination, clearly illustrates that this

pattern was not universal, and that African Americans also occupied houses facing the principal streets. Further, the property provides the only known physical remnant of a house built by African Americans before the Civil War and retained by the same family for decades, further enhancing our understanding of the cultural history of Mount Vernon Triangle.

While the three dwellings on 6th Street contribute to the nineteenth century residential development and character of Mount Vernon Triangle, the Hodges Sandwich Shop and the Lord Baltimore Filling Station contribute to an understanding of its commercial development. During the early to mid-20th century, as automobile suburbs began to emerge to the north and east of the city, Mount Vernon Triangle became a heavily trafficked automobile commuter route, and the former residential area became increasingly commercial and industrial as residents moved out and automobile-related businesses, including repair facilities and gasoline stations, moved in.

The commercial building now known as Hodges Sandwich Shop was constructed in 1923 as the office of E. J. Febrey Heating Company, serving that use for more than 40 years before becoming a carryout restaurant in 1965. Shortly thereafter, the building became home to Hodges Sandwich Shop, a popular successor business to Hodges Restaurant, a longtime, downtown restaurant established by Louis Hodges around 1898. Its current site is one block from its original site and reflects the building's historic orientation and setting, facing north onto a major artery with its east elevation abutting a side alley.

The Lord Baltimore Filling Station No. 12 opened in 1927, convenient to the heavily trafficked K Street and 7th Street corridors. As the market for motor fuel expanded, Louis Blaustein founded the American Oil Company (AMOCO) in 1910, and a decade later established the Lord Baltimore Filling stations to sell their product exclusively. The filling stations, designed according to a company model and part of a branding effort, sought to convey a high level of quality service and product through an attractive and clean appearance. Filling Station No. 12 followed the Spanish Revival-style "house with canopy" design. This model provided office, gas pumps and sheltered area for customers and vehicles on a small footprint which was suited to the urban lot. The building's current site is the location of a former gas station, diagonally across the intersection from its original lot. Its setback placement on the lot reflects its historic corner orientation, facing K Street with adjacent low-rise buildings to the rear and left side.

The Waffle Shop building was constructed across the street from Ford's Theatre in 1950 in a distinctive commercial Moderne style that was characteristic of diners of the period. The building, with its all-glass front, wave-patterned mosaic, and large neon sign on the exterior and its bright-lit and more modernistic interior were meant to attract the attention of passersby during the automobile age. HPRB designated the building a historic landmark in 2008, but in April 2013, determined that it had lost integrity due to material degradation, water infiltration and years of neglect. After detailed drawings were completed that would allow the building to be reconstructed on a new site, the building was demolished. Although the moved building is not directly associated with Mount Vernon Triangle, its restaurant use and design during the automobile age are consistent with the historic themes that characterize the mid-20th century growth of Mount Vernon Triangle. The reconstruction is nine blocks from its original site, but reflects its historic setting on a downtown commercial street in a mixed row of historic commercial buildings and rowhouses.

Evaluation

The Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District was listed in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites in 2005 and in the National Register of Historic Places in 2006 under National Register Criteria A, C and D. The district was designated under Criterion A as its buildings offer a glimpse into the lifestyles of the residents who, through entrepreneurial efforts, contributed significantly to the building of the mercantile community. It was designated under Criterion C for its collection of buildings that represent a variety of building types illustrating the several phases of development and growth in the Mount Vernon Triangle area as it evolved from a residential to a commercial neighborhood. The historic district was also designated under Criterion D for a partially excavated site within the boundaries that had yielded a high concentration of artifacts important to the social history of the merchant community, and remnants of which were known to still be in place. In addition, documentary research concluded that there was a strong potential for archaeological resources to be present elsewhere within the boundaries.

The amended nomination argues that an expansion of the original boundaries both broadens and deepens the district's significance under Criteria A and C and that the addition of the buildings within the boundaries provides a more inclusive understanding of the social development of the neighborhood. It also argues that the expanded area reinforces the architectural significance of the district by including significant examples of the quick service restaurant and filling station on the site.

The proposed amendment offers an unorthodox, yet compelling, case for expansion. Three of the six buildings in the expanded area have been recently moved to the site, and the other three were left out of the 2005 boundaries of the historic district due to physical discontinuity. Despite these irregularities, HPO finds the argument valid, and furthermore finds that the amendment provides important documentation on the more recent histories of the moved buildings that if not properly recorded as part of a deliberate preservation planning effort, could baffle future historians, city planners and the general public. Inclusion within the historic district would permanently protect these buildings, whose preservation reflects sixteen years of public-private coordination to achieve meaningful preservation within a high-density redevelopment area.³

The three houses at 917, 919 and 921 6th Street are historically and architecturally consistent with the residential buildings in Mount Vernon Triangle; they were not included within the 2005 district boundaries only because they were not contiguous to the cohesive collection of 24 buildings and were visually and physically separated from them by the non-historic open site (used car lot) at 6th and K streets. That condition no longer exists. By virtue of the moved buildings on the site, the dwellings are no longer isolated from the historic core. Under Criterion A, the histories of these houses as homes to members of the German immigrant and African American community and the residents' role in the social, cultural and physical development not only follow a consistent pattern of other buildings in the historic district, but they provide new

³ Also reflecting this effort are two nearby projects: the office building at 655 K Street NW referred to in footnote 1, and the HPRB-approved complex in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District at 655 New York Avenue NW, which incorporates 19 historic structures, a number of which were moved.

and notable information to that narrative, particularly as it relates to pre-Civil War free Black history and demographics.

Similarly, the history of the two commercial buildings moved from nearby sites contributes to the significance of Mount Vernon Triangle as it evolved in the early-to mid-20th century into an automobile-centric commercial area where commercial development catered to commuters and to the automobile-related business.

In addition, the Lord Baltimore Filling Station Number 12 and the Waffle Shop qualify for inclusion in the district under Criterion C. The filling station is a rare purpose-built example of its type from the late 1920s, representing a clear architectural expression of the original purpose and function. The structure is one of very few “house with canopy” style filling stations known to survive in Washington, DC, although they were once a common building type. The Waffle Shop qualifies under Criterion C and Criteria Consideration D for reconstructed buildings as an architecturally detailed and highly accurate recreation of a mid-century quick-service restaurant. Its reconstruction was “accurately executed in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan” as required by the National Register for listing.

The existing period of significance for the Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District is 1875-1946. The proposed period of significance expands the dates to 1855-1970 to capture the pre-Civil War history and physical remains of the Somerville house as its beginning date, and the conversion of the Febrey Heating building to the popular Hodges Sandwich Shop in 1970 as the end date. HPO believes the change in the beginning date is well justified, but would argue that the greater significance of the Hodges building in terms of its association with Mount Vernon Triangle is that it was built in 1923 for a small semi-industrial heater sales shop that was typical of the nature of commercial development in Mount Vernon Triangle at that time. HPO believes that the history of the Hodges Restaurant and its successor sandwich shop can be fully captured within the nomination without expanding the period of significance to 1970.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board approve the amendment to the Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District and expand the boundaries to include the collection of six buildings near the southeast corner of 6th and K streets NW. HPO recommends that the Board approve an expanded period of significance to an earlier beginning date of 1855, but retain the existing end date of 1946 which better represents the transition of the area from a residential/commercial neighborhood to a more automobile-centric commercial area that emerged as part of a post-World War II out-migration.

Additionally, HPO recommends that the Board encourage the staff to revise the nomination to more adequately address Criteria Considerations B and E for moved and reconstructed properties, as required by the National Register of Historic Places with the intention of forwarding the amended nomination to the National Register.