

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE



HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
APPLICATION FOR HISTORIC LANDMARK OR HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION

New Designation X
Amendment of a previous designation

Please summarize any amendment(s) _____

Property name Buzzard Point Power Plant (with gatehouse and associated water intake plant)
If any part of the interior is being nominated, it must be specifically identified and described in the narrative statements.

Address 1930 1ST STREET, SW

Square and lot number(s) Square 0665/ ^{Part of} Lot 0024 & Square 0667E/ Lot 0805

Affected Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6D (05)

Date of construction 1932 Date of major alteration(s) 1940

Architect(s) George R. Wryen (of Stone & Webster)

Architectural style(s) MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Moderne

Original use INDUSTRY/Energy facility

Property owner Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO) and the United States of America

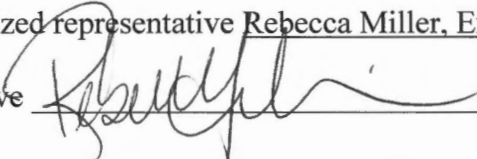
Legal address of property owner 701 9th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001

NAME OF APPLICANT(S) DC Preservation League

If the applicant is an organization, it must submit evidence that among its purposes is the promotion of historic preservation in the District of Columbia. A copy of its charter, articles of incorporation, or by-laws, setting forth such purpose, will satisfy this requirement.

Address/Telephone of applicant(s) 1221 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20036

Name and title of authorized representative Rebecca Miller, Executive Director

Signature of representative  Date 4/14/2016

Name and telephone of author of application _____

Date received 4/27/2016
H.P.O. staff JL

#16-09

6D05-

**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 and 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 any 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 complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Buzzard Point Power Plant (with gatehouse and associated water intake plant)
other names _____

2. Location

street & number Half and V Streets, SW not for publication
city or town Washington vicinity
state DC code _____ county _____ code _____ zip code 20024

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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).

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:

| | | |
|---|-------------------------|----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet. | Signature of the Keeper | Date of Action |
| <input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet. | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Determined not eligible for the National Register. | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register. | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other (explain): _____ | | |
| _____ | | |

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 2 | | buildings |
| | | sites |
| | | structures |
| | | objects |
| | | Total |

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/Energy facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/Energy facility (inactive)

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Moderne

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete
walls brick, stone trim
roof unknown
other

Narrative Description

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

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Description Summary:

The Buzzard Point Power Plant consists of a massive modernistic utilitarian building, containing apparatus used to generate steam power; a rear yard of outdoor mechanical equipment; a gatehouse; and an intake building to the east of the building on the waterfront. The facility is characterized by a fully-articulated Art Moderne steam plant building with an architectural effect that harkens to the design principles of Albert Kahn. The building is a multi-height, partial brick- and stone-clad structural system of reinforced concrete and structural steel.

General Description:

Facing the Anacostia River and recessed from the street, the power plant's primary north elevation is articulated in three main sections – a projecting one-story “office” and primary entrance section in the foreground; followed by the principal three-story section of the building; and a projecting one-story west addition. A rusticated stone (concrete) belt course envelops the entire ground-floor level of the building. Though the north elevation's taller main section emulates the height of a three-story building, it is actually shielding a large, open interior space. Another rusticated stone (concrete) belt course envelops the entire first-story of the north, east and west elevations and includes the central one-story “office” and projecting entrance. The “office”/entrance section is centered on a projecting aperture that features a central double-door pedestrian entrance. The double doors are recessed within the central projection, framed by decorative fluting that is ceremoniously flanked by two Gothic-inspired modernistic sconces. Beyond the sconces, the central entrance is flanked by three window apertures on each side. These apertures feature no additional lintels nor surrounds, and they are filled with non-original windows. The return east and west elevations of the one-story section feature two similar windows per side. Above the central recessed entrance and carved within the stone are the words “BUZZARD POINT PLANT” in mechanical, capitalized font. This one-story section also appears to have a flat roof.

The ground floor portion of the projecting façade bleeds into the main, three-story part of the building, featuring two wider apertures designed to accommodate two-part mullion windows, which are now filled with replacement versions. Dominating the primary façade is an imposing band of nine large, vertical apertures, spanning the second- and third-stories. Seven of the apertures are set within a single band of vertical buff brick mullions that work in concert with, and are centered over, the projecting one-story “office”/ entrance. Flanking these seven apertures, then, are like-apertures that are set between two vertical, simplified bands of fluted pilasters, one set per side. The apertures now feature replacement windows, but were originally multi-component, light metal windows that spanned each vertical aperture without spandrels. Rising above this fenestration is an Art Moderne entablature detail, comprising three horizontal bands, that extends across the building's entire north, east and west elevations. Although the east and west elevations feature different details within the bands. The bottom band is a string course of low-relief geometric patterns that caps the fenestration of nine apertures. Above is another band of buff brick with no additional embellishments. The third band mimics the lowest band in its geometric motif, while also forming a string course that caps the flat roofline of the building's main portion.

The west addition is a one-story portion of the north façade, extending west from the building's main body. The base course here is continued in the form of darker buff brick, extending upward until reaching the vertical aperture sills. These apertures feature replacement windows that are set within a pale buff brick façade. Similar to the main body's primary façade, the west addition is capped in the same geometric low-relief string course that extends to the west elevation of the building.

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The one-story west addition also serves as the base of three massive octagonal buff brick chimneystacks that rise above the highest point of the building's main body. From the vantage point of the north and south elevations, the three stacks appear perfectly aligned as one stack. The individual stacks are best observed at the west elevation, however, where substantial separation is visible.

The one-story west elevation features both the continuous base course of darker buff brick, as well as the continuous string course capping the roof line. The façade is simple in design, featuring five vertical apertures of a very narrow width. The apertures are separated by massive voids of pale buff brick. The main block's west façade is recessed from the single-story west elevation and its three stacks, featuring continuous entablature.

The east elevation is basically three massive stories of pale buff brick, also featuring a continuous stone base course and the same continuous entablature. The continuous base course and upper entablature visually compress fenestrations of four vertical apertures that are separated by expansive sections of pale buff brick. Each of the four narrow apertures is flanked by vertical bands of fluted pilasters, repeated from the north façade.

The south, rear elevation is not articulated in the same stylistic cladding finish, but instead features five sections, all of which are finished in multicolored terra cotta refuge blocks. From left to right, the south elevation is irregular. The first portion is greatly set back from the other four sections, featuring a few apertures that contain replacement louvered vents. The second section, which is the largest of the five, features three large vertical apertures containing replacement windows. The third section is recessed a few feet from the second section and features two like-apertures with replacement windows. The fourth section projects evenly with the second section and features one like-aperture with a replacement window. The fifth section, comprising the south elevation of the west addition, is a solid wall with no apertures.

Extending from the south elevation, a large open yard features all manner of apparatus, ancillary structures, and mechanical components that served some capacity of the steam power facility. This entire outdoor facility is surrounded by a concrete wall.

Along north side of the west elevation, near the northwest corner of the west addition, stands a one-story octagonal building (apparently a gatehouse) of brick and stone masonry construction. Mimicking the north façade, the building here features pale buff brick with a stone base course, capping along the flat roof line. The octagonal building's north elevation features two apertures with original windows, a single pedestrian entrance and an original triple-sash metal casement window. The door is surrounded by rusticated stone that continues from the base course. Above the door is a chrome canopy typical of those used on small buildings in the "modernistic" period. The other seven elevations feature single apertures that each contains an original two-sash metal casement window.

The intake building is a simple one-story, rectangular building that appears with an almost monument-like effect, designed with the same buff brick and Art Moderne feeling as the primary elevation of the main building. The building faces southeast at the Anacostia River to serve its purpose as an intake building. The primary street elevation features a fenestration of three pedestrian entrances equally placed in a perfect division

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of the façade by three. Each entrance is flanked by small window apertures. The building features a flat roof at the center of which is clerestory of roughly five feet in height above the flat roof. This feature adds to the monument-like feel of the building and features a low slung hipped roof. The clerestory features a band of small windows along the riverfront elevation. The riverfront elevation mimics the street view with the exact fenestration of three pedestrian doors with flanking windows. The side elevations feature three window apertures. A narrow wood deck extends along the riverfront of the building.

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)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history.
- B** Property associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- 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)

Property is:

- 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)

Area of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Engineering

Period of Significance

1933-1940

Significant Dates

1933, 1940

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Arch: George R. Wryen (of Stone & Webster)
Build: Stone & Webster

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

Previous documentation on files (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- 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 additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

HSW Kiplinger Library; ML King Library (both Wash DC)

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Summary Statement of Significance:

The Buzzard Point Power Plant is an excellent example of Art Moderne industrial design in Washington, DC. Built by the prominent US design/construction company of Stone & Webster it was considered a monument of technological and artistic advancement at the time of its construction in 1933. Buzzard Point Power Plant stands as the only significant example of Stone & Webster's work in the city. A 1940s addition to building compliments and completes the original design.

The contemporary design of the Buzzard Point Power Plant was intended to prominently display the significance of its owner, advancements in the industry, and the importance of this location on the District's riverfront. Moreover, the modernity of its design represented innovation in the electrical power industry and a shift in perception of industrial infrastructure; from harmful and ominous to efficient and clean technology. From the inception of electric power, generation plants have been associated with smoke, soot, industrial disorder, and grimy coal dust. However, the smooth streamlined lines and light-toned concrete finishes of the Buzzard Point Plant express a new vision of modern industry as the cleanly, ordered product of science and technology. During this era PEPCO also made a deliberate effort to harmonize its functional structures with their environment, going so far as to hire outstanding architects like Arthur Heaton to design art moderne substations, and, in some residential neighborhoods, to disguise its substations as tastefully-designed houses. The excellence of the Buzzard Point Plant's design is a similarly powerful architectural argument for both the acceptance of these structures and a new role for industry as a vehicle for progress.

The Buzzard Point Power Plant thus meets the requirements of significance of National Register Criterion C, Architectural Significance and DC Inventory Criteria D (Architecture & Urbanism) and E (Artistry).

The plant was a major component in the power-generating system of Washington's electrical utility, the Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO), built to accommodate the rapidly increasing needs of the government and the city's population. In this way, it represents an important step in the development of Washington's electrical power utility history. It also was the only major project constructed as part of the early-1930s' plan to create an industrial zone in the deteriorating Buzzard Point neighborhood, a plan which was largely unsuccessful but which anticipated later large-scale city planning efforts. The plant represents an important step in the attempted repurposing of Buzzard Point and indeed in Southwest Washington, as well as in the development of zoning codes and planned development in Washington, DC.

The opening of the Buzzard Point Plant was contemporaneous with the construction of long distance transmission lines linking the PEPCO system Maryland and Pennsylvania utilities to create the initial framework of the modern power grid.¹ During World War II, the plant's expanded capacity was an important source of power for the heavy industrial operations of the nearby Washington Navy Yard and Indian Head Naval Stations.² Ultimately, the expanded generating capacity provided by the Buzzard Point plant was essential for the economic growth of the City of Washington over the next four decades.

¹ Walter O. Beck. *PEPCO: The First 100 Years*. (Washington: Potomac Electric Power Company, 1996), 114-117.

² Beck, 121-122.

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It thus meets the requirements of significance of National Register Criterion A, Broad Patterns of Our History and DC Inventory Criteria B (History).

The 2005 Parsons-Brinckerhoff report *Identification of Historic Architectural Resources: Proposed Improvements to South Capitol Street Corridor* for the District of Columbia Department of Transportation recommended the designation of the Buzzard Point Power Plant and Pumping Station.³ The 2014 joint report of the American Planning Association and American Institute of Certified planners *Buzzard Point: A Southwest Waterfront Community* further recommends that the Buzzard Point Power Plant be preserved. The District of Columbia Office of Planning Report *Buzzard Point: Vision Framework + Implementation Plan* (August 2015) notes that “the grand PEPCO Buzzard Point Power Plant, located on V potentially eligible for listing on the National Register.”⁴

Resource History and Historic Context:

The Very Slight Rise and Later Decline of the Buzzard Point Neighborhood

The earliest history of Buzzard Point has been frequently chronicled and need only be summarized here.⁵ That American Indians congregated at the area, as along other nearby waterways, was shown by the discovery of their implements during improvements to the mouth of the James Creek Canal in 1866.⁶ The explorer John Smith recorded sighting the point in 1608. The land passed from its first colonial owner, George Thompson (from 1663) to Thomas Notley (1671), and ultimately (1770) to Notley Young (west of James Creek, known as Duddington Pasture⁷) and Daniel Carroll (east of the creek), major landowners in the new Federal District.

With the unique government-private distribution of the newly-platted building lots in the District, Massachusetts merchant James Greenleaf and two partners in 1793 purchased about 400 lots in southwest Washington from Young and 20 from Carroll for housing development. Setting an example for other, hesitant speculators, George Washington bought four lots in square 667, the same square as today’s power plant. The area considered as Buzzard Point originally extended from both banks of the confluence of the Potomac and Anacostia (Eastern Branch) Rivers northward to N or M Street.⁸ The segregation of the land west of James Creek as the U.S. Arsenal removed that portion from the popular concept of the neighborhood, and as the southernmost area deteriorated and lost its housing stock the name came to be associated only with the barren area south of Q Street, while the still-populated community

³ Parsons-Brinckerhoff, *Identification of Historic Architectural Resources: Proposed Improvements to South Capitol Street Corridor, Washington, DC*, (unpublished report prepared for DC Department of Transportation), 2005.

⁴ District of Columbia Office of Planning, *Buzzard Point: Vision Framework + Implementation Plan* (August 2015), 16.

⁵ A thorough and convenient account is that of Brian Kraft, *Old Southwest*; see also Evening Star, 21 Dec 1901, p. 32; 30 July 1916, p. 48. This report is taken from these sources unless otherwise referenced. For more detailed studies, see Evening Star, 17 Apr 1910, p. 10; Clark, *Greenleaf and Law . . .*; and Arnebeck, *Through a Fiery Trial*.

⁶ Evening Star, 20 Dec 1866, p. 3.

⁷ Duddington was the name of the earlier Carroll estate, which covered much of southern Capitol Hill.

⁸ See, for example, such a reference in Nat. Republican, 13 May 1876, p. 1. The new elementary school (predecessor to the Syphax School) on O Street was described as being at Buzzard Point (Evening Star, 28 Jan 1871, p. 4). NCPPC planners of the 1920-30s included all blocks south of M.

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north of Q tended to take the names of its larger public housing projects. Here we will use the name Buzzard Point only for the area east of Ft. McNair and south of Q. The neighboring territory east of South Capitol was only vaguely included in Buzzard Point and that usually in planning documents – the 1946 development plan, for example – it being more usually tied to the Navy Yard by locals.

A word must be said also regarding the memorable name of this area. “Turkey Buzzard Point” marked the Point in a map of about 1673 published by Augustine Herman and later ones⁹ -- clearly an indication of its fauna. An Evening Star article of 1894 refers to the Point as “for many years the roost of immense members of that ‘black and ominous’ bird, from which the point derives its name.”¹⁰ The correct name is Buzzard Point, although it has always been varied as Buzzards Point and (more commonly and improbably) Buzzard’s Point.

This peculiar name has regularly attracted uncomplimentary attention, leading to satire and occasional proposals to find a more genteel moniker. On news that the Point was being called Greenleaf’s Point, an early resident declared: “Truly the new name is more grateful to the ear and more becoming this lovely scene where wed the Potomac and the Anacostia.” The National Park and Planning Commission entertained a similar proposal in its remaking of the area in 1932.¹¹ A published suggestion of 2013 (“The Point”) was quickly shot down by traditionalists. James Creek,¹² descending lazily from near the Capitol, entered the River in a wide mouth exactly at the Point, bifurcating the land there. The somewhat distinct point west of the Creek was for a while called “Young’s Point” from its owner, Notley Young, and then “Greenleaf’s Point” after its next owner (now more commonly “Greenleaf Point”). It is this name that appeared in the 1861 Boschke map and subsequent Baist maps. After the U.S. Arsenal (today’s Ft. McNair) took the entire area west of the Creek “Arsenal Point” became another popular name. The eastern point remained Buzzard Point.

Mercantile activity around Buzzard Point, envisioned by Washington and planned by L’Enfant, never occurred. The many docks of the original city plan¹³ were not built and Greenleaf’s “Twenty Buildings”¹⁴ sat uncompleted and derelict. A problem with this plan was that the area – swampy if not pestilential – became too shallow for good harborage.¹⁵ In spite of recurrent dredging, incoming ships avoided Buzzard Point as they approached the Navy Yard

⁹ Duhamel, “Analoston Island”; Evening Star, 3 Dec 1894, p. 14.

¹⁰ Evening Star, 3 Feb 1894, p. 17. “No buzzards are there now” (Evening Star, 30 July 1916, p. 48). Evening Star, 17 Apr 1910, p. 20 says it was called “Buckman’s Point” in colonial times, and an unnamed 1803 map reproduced in Kraft, *Old Southwest*, shows the name “Wind Mill Point” there; all others use Buzzard Point.

¹¹ For an example of satire, see Wash. Post, 22 July 1929, p. 16; (quotation) taken from Clark, *Greenleaf and Law...*, quoted in Emery, “Washington Newspapers”; (renaming proposal) Wash. Post, 13 Aug 1932, p. 14. “The dwellers down that way accept the name without protest, and not one of them suggested ... that for the sake of euphony and property values the name should be changed” (Evening Star, 30 July 1916, p. 48).

¹² Originally St. James Creek, shortened to “James” in the early years of the District, in honor of James Greenleaf according (speculatively?) to Evening Star, 21 Dec 1901, p. 32.

¹³ There were three constructed in the general area of Buzzard Point by 1803 and another, larger one in the 1820s; see Kraft, *Old Southwest*, pp. 13, 26.

¹⁴ In the area of the development earlier planned but not built by Carroll to the east of James Creek – “Carrollsbury”. “A number of houses were projected, some few were finished, but many being left in a half-finished state fell into decay, after having been occupied by negroes and low whites” (Rives, “Old Families and Houses”).

¹⁵ A contemporary writer attributed this to contractors dumping dredge mud from the canal into the nearby Anacostia (Evening Star, 23 Feb 1874, p. 1). In 1883 President Arthur and his party were grounded for several hours on the bar (Evening Star, 21 July 1883, p. 1).

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into the twentieth century.¹⁶ Inland building lots at the Point sold for 2 or 3 cents/front foot in 1800, while speculation drove waterfront lots as high as \$8/front foot, but this soon dropped to 1 cent and \$1-2 respectively. In 1910 selling price of the same lots stood at almost the same: 4 cents and 90 cents-\$2.¹⁷

In 1804 the government sited the U.S. Arsenal at Greenleaf's Point,¹⁸ removing all land west of James Creek from general commercial and residential use. A Federal penitentiary was constructed within the grounds in 1831, leading the low area at the mouth of the Creek (outside the Arsenal area) to be called "Penitentiary Marsh". And finally, the muddy, diffuse James Creek was straightened, enclosed within stone retaining walls, and connected to the Washington City Canal in 1866, a project envisioned by L'Enfant.¹⁹ This last work not only improved the canal's usefulness and added 20 acres of firm land to the Point and the Arsenal, but helped "abate the nuisance in the shape of an extensive marsh lying between the Arsenal and Buzzard Point . . . Residents escaped the usual sickness originating from the marsh last season."²⁰

Not canal, wharves nor Arsenal²¹ brought prosperity to Buzzard Point, nor in fact to the southwestern quadrant of the District, which by the 1850s was known generally as "The Island" for its isolation from the rest of the city.²² "From the Navy Yard westward along the Eastern Branch to Greenleaf's Point was a wild stretch of land with here and there a hovel or a house – and the stouring of brick kilns," recalled an elderly resident in 1901 of the pre-Civil War period.²³ A careful study of the area published in 1910 found no history of buildings there before 1830 except "some simple wharves and shacks along the shore," and citizens petitioning on behalf of a railroad project in 1859 stated that "the condition of that portion of the city has been an eyesore for the last quarter of a century."²⁴ A count of structures in the

¹⁶ Wrote landowner Thomas Law in 1804, arguing for construction of the Washington City Canal: "Hemp, timber, flour . . . etc. may be conveyed from the Potomack to the Navy-yard on the Eastern Branch [via the canal] without taking the circuitous and hazardous route by Turkey Buzzard point, which requires also two tides" (Law, "Observations")

¹⁷ *Evening Star*, 17 Apr 1910, p. 20. Squares and lots were designated which were mostly under water – "water lots" – and found initial buyers. It would be interesting to learn what happened to the ownership of these non-existent lots. The southernmost squares were the only ones below Q with the more narrow rowhouse-sized building lots – the squares above T Street (except Square 661, with little residential Augusta Street down its center) all had much larger lots. Perhaps those lower squares were platted later, when building practices had changed.

¹⁸ There had earlier been some artillery mounted at the tip of the Point.

¹⁹ In spite of a completed canal being shown on virtually all commercial maps of the District printed before that time, and which seem to have copied from each other and ultimately the L'Enfant plan, more careful maps such as Boschke and military topographical maps confirm that James Creek remained only that until 1866, and that (a few careless cartographers notwithstanding) it did not connect with the canal system.

²⁰ *Evening Star*, 22 June 1866, p. 1; 20 Dec 1866, p. 3; 21 Dec 1901, p. 32. The 1866 work also created the sea wall along the eastern tip of Greenleaf Point. Besides the latter article, a good history of the Arsenal will be found in *Evening Star*, 17 Apr 1932, p. 82. The masonry wall below P Street contained only the west side of the canal, according to a very detailed account in *Evening Star*, 17 Dec 1887, p. 1, and later photos.

²¹ For many years a marsh and unbridged creek/canal separated the neighborhood from the Arsenal; the still-standing brick wall along Ft. McNair's original eastern boundary was built in the very late 1920s, judging from representations in the Baist maps. No source consulted, including census records of occupations, gives any indication that the Arsenal gave work to the nearby community in the way the Navy Yard nurtured its neighborhood.

²² So labeled on the Boschke map of 1857.

²³ Sunderland, Bryan, "Washington As I Knew It", in *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, vol. 5. CHS, Washington DC. 1902.

²⁴ Respectively: *Evening Star*, 17 Apr 1910, p. 20; 12 Feb 1859, p. 2. "That portion of Washington has up to this time been entirely neglected by the corporate authorities, perhaps because . . . there has been no real demand for its due improvement" (*Evening Star*, 13 Apr 1859, p. 2);

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city made by Montgomery Meigs in 1853 found exactly eight frame houses and one shop in all of Buzzard Point (below Q Street).²⁵ There was no passageway over the Creek/canal below N Street,²⁶ and so no direct access to the Arsenal.

Newspaper references to the Buzzard Point community from the mid-nineteenth century mostly pertain to: stray farm animals; crime; drowning and boating accidents; boats stolen, lost or sunk; illegal fishing and swimming; hunting (duck, pigeon, rabbit) and concomitant shooting accidents. The riverbank was a popular spot for mass baptisms (“by colored people”), for baseball and bowling games, and for illegal prize fights. The only (legal) businesses mentioned were “a drinking house” and a single brick yard.²⁷ The few descriptions of area housing range from “a neat little frame house” to “an unsightly frame shanty.” A submerged torpedo was once found in the water off the Point.

The rural life of the area – certainly not unique in the District of that time but even then notable – is illustrated by an account of a river pleasure cruise in 1860: “As the steamer rounded the Arsenal Point and entered the Anacostia River, the attention of those on board was directed to the daring aquatic feats of a faded gray horse and two curs, evidently pertaining to the lik denoted Buzzard’s Point, into which they were perceptibly incited by a voice and pair of hard bare heels owned by a codling in abbreviated overall, also a Buzzard’s Pointer.”²⁸

The 1866 draining of the James Creek marsh, which hopefully opened much new land “for occupancy by buildings, workshops, etc.,” accomplished little in that line.²⁹ A survey of District buildings conducted by the Water Department in 1875 listed 36 residences (of which 7 were brick), 8 “shanties” and 6 businesses in the neighborhood. The businesses comprised a brickyard, a stoneyard, a factory, two slaughter-houses, and one shop.³⁰ These structures were concentrated along South Capitol and First Streets. Detailed maps (Boschke 1861, Barnard 1865, Sachse 1884, Hopkins 1893, Baist 1903 and later) never show more than a scattering of mostly frame buildings there. The Police Census of 1894 (the earliest reported) found 323 inhabitants living south of Q Street (including the south side of Q)³¹ – 117 whites and 146 blacks, generally living side-by-side in the same squares.³²

The isolated and rural quality of the area was as evident then as now. The detailed maps of infrastructure improvements included in the 1880 Engineer Annual Report show that not one type of civic work – pavement, gas lines, water mains, sewers, trolley, schools, police or fire stations, even street trees – extended south of M Street.

The Washington Post’s reporter Russell Gray (“Washington By-Ways”) visited the neighborhood in 1886 and has left a charming picture of this long-lost community. Having walked south on 1st Street past “a varying succession of

“a portion of Washington . . . so far a closed book” (Evening Star, 10 Nov 1859, p. 2); “this portion of Washington, so eligible for business purposes, . . . has been avoided as if infected by the plague” (Evening Star, 22 June 1866, p. 1).

²⁵ See Kraft, *Old Southwest*.

²⁶ Kraft (p. 26) found a notice of a bridge at S Street in 1844 but it did not appear in later maps.

²⁷ Although much is made of brickyards in the area – which had the largest concentration in the District -- most of them were located outside of Buzzard Point as I define it here, along South Capitol north of Q or in nearby Southeast. Lumbaryards also figure in contemporary accounts, perhaps informal ones (see, e.g., Evening Star, 22 May 1917, p. 15); only one appeared in City Directories below Q Street.

²⁸ Evening Star, 26 June 1860, p. 3.

²⁹ Evening Star, 20 Dec 1866, p. 3.

³⁰ Kraft, *Old Southwest*.

³¹ Including those on the south side of that street, somewhat inflating the number compared to these below taken from the decennial census.

³² Critic-Record, 30 Aug 1886, p. 3; Nat. Republican, 30 Aug 1884, p. 3.

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houses and vacant lots," Gray noted about three blocks of "miserable hovels" south of M Street and that at about Q the street began to gently slope downward as it left the last cluster of houses.

It [1st Street] is bordered on either side by true market gardens in the highest state of cultivation. One no longer wonders where the celery comes from: here are whole squares given up to its culture. The fields are interspaced with orchards of small fruit trees and occasionally these miniature farms have buildings set back from the road and profusely surrounded with chickens, stables and farm implements. [He compared this peaceful scene to Holland.] Some of the architecture about Buzzard Point is peculiar. It cannot be described by any of the familiar terms of architecture. One of its marked features is lattice work. The more lattice work and picket fence the more the owner is looked up to in the community.³³

The 1900 census counted 231 persons (many of them children) living south of Q Street, almost exactly divided between black and white and generally on the same blocks, almost all along the eastern streets. A number of the whites were immigrants. By far the most common occupations were: gardener/farmer, day laborer, carpenter, dressmaker, and servant; "at school" is also commonly seen. Bookkeeper, fireman, policeman, engineer stand out as exceptional. A certain number lived on boats – not the yachtsmen of today but those of the working class. An elderly man who had lived on his boat at the Point "for several years" died of heatstroke in 1909,³⁴ and the 1940 census listed no fewer than ten white people living on houseboats, including one whose occupation was "fisherman". "I am assured by an old resident who made a recent pilgrimage to the spot [1901], that it was almost impossible for him to recognize places familiar to him in boyhood."³⁵ Gray's wishful description of 1886 contrasts sharply with accounts of the 1910s and this probably indicates a severe decline in the fortunes of the neighborhood:

"Travel down among the market gardens and the untilled fields toward Buzzard's Point. If one goes down that way he finds that some streets change into dusty and muddy roads, narrow and crooked, only foot paths and [sometimes] not even so much improved as that. There are acres and acres of land overgrown with weeds – weeds as tall as a man – dense, tangled masses of them. Around the junction of Potomac Avenue and Half Street the weed jungle really begins and continues southward. A roadway the name of which is not known to people who live in that "down-town" district, runs from W Street and loses itself in the weeds." (*Evening Star*, 3 Aug 1912, p. 11, abridged)

"In going down in the land of old Carrollsburg one may turn to the south from N Street. You will walk under one of the finest arcades of elms in the city. If you pass south down Half Street your way will be bordered by houses until you come to O Street. After that your way will be dusty and shadeless. Dwellings become sparse and there are wide stretches of garden lands, abandoned brick lands and ruined brick-making plants and fields of weeds between them, but close to the tip of that strange country there is a cluster of little homes and a store, and within a few feet of the point stands a dwelling with a little garden of carefully tended flowers and there a pleasant family finds comfort, happiness and health. It is the southernmost home in Washington." (*Evening Star*, 30 July 1916, p. 48, abridged; the article includes a photo of the house and the family.³⁶)

³³ Wash. Post, 21 Nov 1886, p. 7, abridged. "A stranger is a very strange thing on Buzzard Point" (*Evening Star*, 30 July 1916, p. 48).

³⁴ Wash. Post, 11 Aug 1909, p. 4.

³⁵ Rives, "Old Families and Houses".

³⁶ Other photos of old houses at Buzzard Point will be found in: *Evening Star*, 6 Feb 1927, p. 78; and 7 Sept 1930, p. 85. The Historical Society of Washington holds a number in its collection.

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As Buzzard Point failed to establish a place in the larger society of the growing city its geographic and economic isolation attracted thoughts for new uses for the area. The most novel of these related to trash disposal. In 1865 municipal scavengers simply deposited night soil into the James Creek Canal; Buzzard Point was appointed one of the two new sites for such refuse, and a small dump depot was built on S Street.³⁷ No one lived there except the commandant of the Arsenal, who fruitlessly complained. This annoying facility was joined in 1881 by the fertilizer factory of Mr. H. Clay Jones, maker of "Jones' Prolific Guano" (from rendered animal carcasses) – a place, noted the neighbors, "very prolific in odors." With such a reputation, other haulers began routinely dumping manure "and other offensive material" nearby.³⁸

Jones' manufactory was replaced by that of C. B. Jewell by 1888, whose facility at Half and W saw regular inspections by the city's Health Officer. Jewell's successor, Norton & Bro. (at the same location), burned in 1900 and was not replaced. The National Sanitary Company's ultra-modern fertilizer plant, built at the very bottom of South Capitol in 1892 ("The drainage is into the river via the gutter of South Capitol Street"), mercifully burned after three years, and the company then relocated to the far side of the Anacostia.³⁹

Dumping and rendering were not the only olfactory and health threats relegated to this unloved part of town. The new (1899) sewer system included an outfall running into the Canal. "These sewers carry a large volume of sewage into the [Anacostia] river each day."⁴⁰ And a galling annoyance was the official designation of the wharf on South Capitol Street as the point from which dead animals, collected by city contractors from the streets, were shipped to rendering plants now moved to Giesboro (in DC) and Virginia. City inspectors visited the wharf in 1893 and reported finding "two dead horses on scow . . . exposed to hot sun, one much swollen and odorous; also an accumulation of bones partially covered by putrid flesh and giving off an offensive stench; [the next week] five dead horses . . . basking in hot sun, swollen and odorous; [the next day] five dead horses on boat, greatly swollen and decomposing."⁴¹

One can be dismayed but not surprised to see regular advertisements from about this period: "FOR SALE – Is Your Business Objectionable to Your Neighbors? Then buy on Buzzards Point, 1st St, SW; 10,000 feet for sale cheap."⁴² The ancient problem of the James Creek Canal ("this navigable sewer") persisted. Even after James Creek's 1866 widening and improvement barges could only travel as far north as P Street (where it measured 60 feet wide and 10 feet deep at low tide);⁴³ the Canal seems to have never contributed materially to the area's development. A citizen petition of 1896 summarized its broken promises: "This open sewer, by reason of its foul waters and filth, is fatal to the health and creates a frightful mortality in this vicinity . . . The canal will never be of any considerable value to commerce or business, inasmuch as it is too narrow and shallow to allow the passage of any vessel larger . . . than a sand scow." They wanted it covered over. The canal was filled in as far south as G Street by 1903, from G to N Streets by 1911, and southward to P in 1916. The Evening Star (1911) wondered if the section below P, with its

³⁷ The other was at 17th Street on the Potomac (Evening Star, 17 Oct 1873, p. 4).

³⁸ Evening Star, 27 Nov 1865, p. 2; Nat. Republican, 11 May 1881, p. 4.

³⁹ Critic-Record, 25 Sept 1888, p. 4; Evening Star, 7 Nov 1893, p. 6; Evening Times, 5 June 1896, p. 2; Wash Post, 14 Aug 1893, p. 8; 5 May 1900, p. 1. The National Sanitary factory, "one-story high, with a large brick building," was a minor effort by Paul J. Pelz, who had just designed the majestic Library of Congress building (Wash. Post, 23 Oct 1892, p. 10).

⁴⁰ Evening Star, 17 Jan 1899, p. 11. "The District's sewage station" sat just across South Capitol Street (Wash. Times, 29 Sept 1911, p. 1).

⁴¹ Evening Star, 5 Aug 1893, p. 4.

⁴² Wash. Herald, 11 Feb 1909, p. 10.

⁴³ The work is minutely described in Evening Star, 22 June 1866, p. 1.

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“picturesque possibilities” and still-possible commercial use (“there being lumber yards, sand and gravel dumps and brick works” nearby) could be redeemed. That last portion was used as a city dump until 1930, when the Corinthian Yacht Club, moving to the DC shore from Virginia, received permission to fill it in when it created its new yacht basin.⁴⁴

As the canal failed in its purpose, so also died the idea of useful harborage at the Point. The last recorded suggestion of this type dated from 1859 (the terminal of a proposed cargo steamship line).⁴⁵ From this time on work on the river along the Point aimed to facilitate water traffic past Buzzard Point – to the Navy Yard. The Eastern Branch channel was dredged in 1876, 1883, and almost continuously in 1903-13. These projects also allowed the government to fill in the flats on both sides of the Anacostia. The 1908 project no doubt dismayed the local boys: “For many years [the] beach extending from Buzzards Point . . . was a favorite bathing place. The deepening of the channel has totally destroyed the beach,” creating a perpendicular bank above a fifteen-foot depth of water. Navigation beacons lit the reformed channel after 1912.⁴⁶

Another early proposal for Buzzard Point was railroad use. Such a suggestion – linking the inland areas of the city to the Anacostia via rail rather than canal – was first made in 1851 and again in 1859. These were followed by railroad plans in the 1870s and ‘90s.⁴⁷ As with every other such development plan, proponents believed the innovation would bring purpose to the neighborhood and a rise in property values (and hence in taxes), and such announcements did lead to occasional, and short-lived, land-speculation.

Other projects also were mooted: a private factory, more federal munitions facilities, an enlarged sewage pumping station, a trash incinerator, an airport, a park, an extension of the Botanical Garden, a public beach for blacks, and a relocation site for the city’s main wholesale market, displaced by the new National Archives building.⁴⁸ The McMillan Commission Plan confined its recommendations regarding the Potomac-Anacostia waterfront to more wharves backed by an elevated road (pp. 83-84) and even that was not clearly intended to include the Point. Note that during this entire period Buzzard Point and L’Enfant’s broad South Capitol Street formed a dead-end – the initial (and current) South Capitol Street (Douglass) Bridge was built in 1950.

These plans grew against a background of the steady deterioration of Buzzard Point’s community base. If the population below Q Street stood at 231 souls in 1900, it had dropped to 185 in the 1920 census (89 white, 96 black), 87 in 1930 (39-48), and finally 34 in 1940 (19-15). The recorded occupations remained humble ones, “driver” replacing “gardener” by 1920, and still showed a sprinkling of immigrants and more exalted professions – bookkeeper,

⁴⁴ Evening Star, 22 June 1866, p. 1; 25 Feb 1896, p. 1; 16 Apr 1911, p. 20; 11 June 1916, p. 26; 22 Feb 1930, p. 16. The 1911 article describes Buzzard Point as “a quaint, semi-rural section . . . covered with market gardens and small orchards.” The 1932 Baist map shows the section south of S Street still not filled in; perhaps this was the part used by the yacht club and the P-S stretch had been eliminated in an intermediate project.

⁴⁵ Daily Union, 15 Feb 1848, p. 3; Evening Star, 13 Apr 1859, p. 2. The suggestion was resurrected briefly in 1929 and later, as will be described.

⁴⁶ Evening Star, 21 July 1883, p. 1; 17 Nov 1903, p. 15; 2 Apr 1905, p. 10; 20 Oct 1908, p. 18; Wash. Times, 30 Sept 1911, p. 5; 3 Aug 1912, p. 12; 17 Apr 1913, p. 15.

⁴⁷ Daily National Intelligencer, 17 Nov 1851, p. 3; Evening Star, 12 Feb 1859, p. 2; 23 Feb 1874, p. 1; 16 Aug 1890, p. 6.

⁴⁸ (Factory) Wash. Post, 12 Nov 1909, p. 16; Wash. Times, 13 Nov 1909, p. 5; (munitions) Wash. Times, 13 Sept 1916, p. 1; (sewage) Evening Star, 17 Dec 1887, p. 1; (incinerator) Wash. Post, 22 Jan 1928, p. M1; (airport) Evening Star, 3 July 1929, p. 26; (park) Evening Star, 16 May 1916, p. 6; (Bot Gard) Evening Star, 6 Dec 1925, p. 4; (beach) Afro-American, 13 June 1925, p. 1; (market) Wash. Post, 21 Jan 1928, p. 1.

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telephone girl, machinist (at the Navy Yard), several fire- and policemen, and gravedigger. The last years included the steward of the nearby Corinthian Yacht Club.⁴⁹ Although the racial mix remained impressive the addresses show somewhat greater residential separation. The ten persons living on houseboats in 1940 were all white. City Directories from the late 1910s show no businesses and many vacant buildings below Q. A visitor of 1930 reported the area still dominated by “farm land and trucking land”, and aerial photos of about the same period show tidy plots with occasional houses, a few brick and of some substance.⁵⁰

The Planned (and Unsuccessful) Industrialization of Buzzard Point

In the early twentieth century, the City Beautiful movement’s emphasis on aesthetically-pleasing, ordered vistas created the need for a mirroring landscape in which unaesthetic but essential functions could take place out of sight. This requirement soon led to an institutionalized definition of Buzzard Point as an area of the city to which noisome functions could be relegated.

As the old gardening community declined a consensus grew that the best use of the Point was industrial. The new (1920) system of zoning provided a perfect vehicle for this. The Washington Chamber of Commerce’s Zoning Committee in 1920 recommended enlargement of industrial and second-commercial zones, and included all of Buzzard Point below M Street in the former category.⁵¹ Press articles spoke of “the owners of property at Buzzard Point” in eager discussion with planners.

Sensitive to the disuse of the area and the need for an industrial section in the District, the National Capital Park and Planning Commission⁵² charged its staff engineer, Capt. E. N. Chisolm, Jr. to study the possibilities. Chisolm’s report, “Waterfront Development – War College to Navy Yard” was presented to the Commission at its May 1929 meeting⁵³ and served as the basis for the industrialization of Buzzard Point.

Chisolm began by noting that Buzzard Point (the entire section south of M Street) represented “the only undeveloped, cheap priced area within the city proper that is outside of the range of park or boulevard development.”⁵⁴ It was near existing railroad tracks serving the Navy Yard, the current landowners were favorable to development, and it had been already tagged for more intensive use in the National Capital Planning Commission’s (NCPPC) planning of the Washington Channel and in “a confidential railroad study.” It was “the only available site [for] development [of] suitable facilities for interchange of water and railroad commerce,” with space for terminal and transfer buildings. To achieve this plan, he proposed: improvement and further construction of the bulkhead; river dredging; construction of transit sheds and railroad freight stations; new railroad lines; a new service street 150 feet wide; and a bridge crossing the Anacostia River from Q Street.

⁴⁹ Among the last of these residents was Charles Hunt, a veteran who lived with his brother Thomas in a “two-room shack” and died in a fire in 1937. Apparently long-time Buzzard Pointers, their sister Gertrude had died fifteen years earlier also in a fire. They all lived near the very tip of the Point. (Wash. Post, 3 Feb 1937, p. 5)

⁵⁰ (Visitor) Evening Star, 7 Sept 1930, p. 84; (photos) from the Special Collections of the National Defense University library.

⁵¹ Evening Star, 11 Aug 1920, p. 15.

⁵² Later changed to the National Capital Planning Commission.

⁵³ And will be found the minutes, in the National Archives, Record Group 328, Entry 1.

⁵⁴ “Land that has been dormant for many years”.

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The NCPPC pursued this plan through 1930⁵⁵ and approved a proposed rail plan at its October 1931 meeting. Congress passed the “Buzzards [sic] Point Railroad Bill” on 18 June 1932. The tracks were laid later that year.⁵⁶ Railroad lines to the Point were the first requisite for its industrialization – new zoning was the second. A request for change of zoning classification from residential to industrial 90-foot D was presented to the Zoning Commission by PEPCO in June 1932, covering only the area of the company’s proposed power station (T to V, 2nd to Water Streets), but was later amended to take in the entire Buzzard Point area south of P Street. At its October 1932 meeting the Commission (at the request of NCPPC) approved a reduced industrial area “to protect the residential development of the Washington Sanitary Housing Corporation and the view from the War College.”⁵⁷

With the important pieces in place, the District and its partners – the local landowners and NCPPC – put out a Welcome sign for major industry to inhabit the neighborhood. “The Commission hopes industrial interests will center at Buzzards Point, turning the desolate area into a thriving industrial zone.” The Washington Merchants and Manufacturers Association and the Washington Real Estate Board already had initiated a joint project toward this end. NCPPC hopefully organized a round-table conference of government and private players (announced by Chisolm) to integrate its plans with a proposed Port of Washington Authority. The Commission heard testimony suggesting a more “dignified” name (Duddington, Carrollsberg) to help attract builders.⁵⁸

This euphoria in the end did not result in a great deal of industrial development. Gulf Refining Company built an oil and gasoline storage plant on the 1700 block of South Capitol/Water Streets in 1933. A “Map of South Washington” prepared “for proposed track extensions” at the time shows many industrial concerns spotted to the north of Q Street and east of South Capitol but absolutely none south of Q.⁵⁹ Notes on a 1938 Baist map (in the Washington Historical Society) indicate “Leased to NCHA [National Capital Housing Authority] – Temp Housing” on squares 605, 607, 661 and 663; the last two are also marked “Heurich”, the name of a large local brewer.

The only other new development the area attracted was the splendid new Corinthian Yacht Club, displaced from its earlier site on the Virginia side of the Potomac by various river projects to the mouth of the old canal, which the club itself now reshaped and deepened. The Evening Star’s enthusiasm for this project is still infectious, and its description of the site’s previous condition telling: “Gone are the abandoned rusting frames and battered bodies of defunct automobiles. Gone are the tin sheds of squatters and disreputable characters . . . The club grounds are rounding rapidly into shape, roads are being built, a railway [for lifting boats from the water] is being installed, provision is being made for ample parking, . . . what was once a jungle of matted vines and scrub growth being cleared and made into a park. . . Buzzards Point has had its head lifted.”⁶⁰

⁵⁵ See, for example: Wash. Post, 22 Sept 1930, p. 18; Evening Star, 23 Oct 1932, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Wash. Post, 29 June 1932, p. 16.

⁵⁷ Wash. Post, 10 June 1932, p. 20; Evening Star, 24 Sept 1932, p. 17; Wash. Post, 12 Oct 1932, p. 16. As part of the power plant project portions of Water and U Streets were also closed (see PEPCO documents in the NCPC Planning Files; National Archives, RG 328, Item 545-30, Box 52)

⁵⁸ (Quote) Evening Star, 23 Oct 1932, p. 3; (Assn/Bd) Wash. Post, 16 Feb 1930, p. 13; (conference) Evening Star, 1 Apr 1932, p. 36; (name) Evening Star, 22 July 1932, p. 17.

⁵⁹ (Gulf) Wash. Post, 25 Nov 1930, p. 4; 7 May 1933, p. 8; (map) NCPC Planning Files (National Archives, RG 328, Item 545-30, Box 52).

⁶⁰ Evening Star, 15 Nov 1930, p. 22.

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And so, the PEPCO power plant was the only major industrial installation that actually rose in the new industrial zone of the District of Columbia.

Electrical Power in the District of Columbia, and PEPCO⁶¹

Two technical developments brought electricity to Washington in the post-Civil War period, as they did to other American cities: electric lighting and electrically powered streetcars.

An experimental system of battery-powered arc lighting was installed in the Capitol in 1867, although reliable incandescent lights were not installed until 1885.⁶² At the same time public demonstrations of the new system at such events as the Garfield Inaugural Ball at the National Building Museum in 1881 led to increased interest.⁶³ While some federal departments installed dedicated generators in their buildings, business leaders' took tentative steps to establish of commercial power companies. The Heisler Company set up a generator at the Washington Post building at 10th and D Streets NW and installed electric street lamps downtown in 1880-81 to great applause; the White House was fitted up in 1890.⁶⁴ House- and business-owners all clamored for the new systems, by now rapidly showing technical improvements. Some business owners, such as the Woodward & Lothrop Company, purchased their own generating plants.⁶⁵

In 1882 Heisler was re-organized as the United States Electric Lighting Company and soon after amalgamated with its rival Brush-Swan Electric Company. Despite a disastrous fire that ruined the original plant at the Post building in 1885, the new USELCO successfully converted its lighting from the primitive arc system to incandescent technology and erected a central plant at B and 13th Streets NW in downtown Washington in 1887.⁶⁶

Gradually, electric lighting replaced gas lamps. However, during the next decade, USELCO faced competition from street car companies, which generated electricity for motive power and sold the excess to residential customers along their routes, the Edison Company, which sold dedicated power plants to large customers such as federal agencies, and the rival Potomac Electric Company, founded in 1891. The city's first electric streetcar system was that of the Eckington and Soldiers' Home Railway Company established in 1888, which supplied electricity from its own generators. It was at this time that the federal government mandated underground cables rather than aerial for transmission. Other similar companies – Brightwood, Georgetown and Tenallytown – followed suit in the 1890s, leading to the creation of "streetcar suburbs" along their lines, even into Maryland. The Edison Company scored several stunning successes, building a plant to electrify the Executive Office Building and the White House in 1890.⁶⁷ To maintain its competitiveness, in 1898 USELCO built a new plant at 14th Street and Constitution Avenue that replaced the earlier Direct Current systems favored by Edison with the new Alternating Current system that permitted power to be transmitted longer distances without substantial voltage drop.

⁶¹ The information in this section is taken from Heritage USA "Historic Utility System Study", and PEPCO 100 Years, listed in the bibliography.

⁶² <http://www.aoc.gov/blog/capitol-illumination>

⁶³ BECK, 18.

⁶⁴ BECK, 19.

⁶⁵ BECK, 29.

⁶⁶ BECK, 32.

⁶⁷ BECK, 36.

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But UELCO's most formidable competitor was the Potomac Electric Company (PEC), begun to supply electricity for lighting and transportation purposes in Georgetown and northwest DC from a plant at Chain Bridge and a streetcar powerhouse at Wisconsin Avenue and Calvert Street. In 1896, the PEC's new owners bought the Eckington & Soldiers Home streetcar line, merged it and some other street car companies into the Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO), and built a larger plant in a former iron works on the Georgetown waterfront. Three years later, through a series of boardroom maneuvers and strategic stock purchases, PEPCO absorbed USELCO. This merger made PEPCO the sole supplier of electric power in Washington DC. Meanwhile, an Act of Congress completed the merger of the city's street car lines into the Washington Traction and Electric Company (WTEC) in 1900. In 1901, legislation reorganized the WTEC into the Washington Railway and Electric Company (WREC), a holding company which controlled PEPCO.⁶⁸

Into the early twentieth century, PEPCO struggled to keep pace with power demand through a variety of makeshift strategies. These included rebuilding the original USELCO plant on B Street, installing huge storage batteries at substations, and continuing to supplement major generating sites with small street car plants, including the Metropolitan car barn powerhouse at 24th and P Streets NW, the Eckington powerhouse at 4th and T Streets NE, the Columbia car barn at 15th and H Streets NE, the Capitol Railway Power House, and the Brightwood Station.⁶⁹ In 1906 PEPCO opened its large Benning plant, as well as a network of substations to step down the power for consumer use. The Benning plant's site offered many advantages over earlier downtown locations. Its coal-fired steam boilers had a ready source of water from the Anacostia River, and its proximity to the B&O Railroad network provided a ready source of fuel. Moreover, its removal from densely-populated downtown minimized complaints about the smoke and ash from its stacks for a least a few years.⁷⁰

As the city's population and institutions became addicted to electricity the regularly-expanded Benning plant carried the load of these supply requirements. The federal government built its own generating plant at the base of Capitol Hill near South Capitol Street in 1910, supplying its buildings on the Hill. PEPCO came under the jurisdiction of the newly-created Public Utilities Commission of DC in 1913, but the Commission did not take over the city's streetcar and electricity operations as originally planned.

In the 1920s PEPCO expanded into the electric appliance business (the Potomac Electric Appliance Company, 1920) and operation of the city's new electric street lights (1925). Electric lines spread into nearby Maryland and Virginia in 1928, at first all originating from Benning but later taking power from new plants in Alexandria (VA) and Dickerson and Morgantown (MD), but still centered on the Benning plant.

In the years immediately preceding the Great Depression, demands on PEPCO's generation capacity increased markedly. With the planning of the Federal Triangle further use of the old power plant at 14th and Constitution became untenable. At the same time the Pennsylvania Railroad, which was expanding its operation in the Washington area, reported its greatly increased power needs to PEPCO, which began seeking a location for a large new generation plant. The search took the company to Buzzard Point.

⁶⁸ BECK, 62.

⁶⁹ BECK, 66.

⁷⁰ BECK, 68.

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The Buzzard Point Power Plant

PEPCO announced plans for a new auxiliary power plant in June 1931. "The plant would be extensible and, beginning with one or two power units . . . would be enlarged as demand . . . grew." Company officials looked not only at the general increase in demand but also the danger of having only one major generating facility – Benning – which, if incapacitated by some catastrophe would leave the capital city dependent on far-away Baltimore for power.⁷¹ Sites rumored under consideration were Geisboro Point (present Bolling AFB), a riverside place near Alexandria, and Buzzard Point.⁷²

Buzzard Point had its attractions and problems for the company. It was centrally located. It was near a good supply of water (the generators would be worked by steam). Coal could be easily and cheaply brought there by the new railroad tracks and the (envisioned) wharves. On the other hand, the design would fall under purview of the Commission on Fine Arts and the NCPPC; the requisite tall stacks would certainly become lightning rods for criticism. ("Some industrial plants in Germany, attractively designed to conceal smokestacks by a pyramid effect, have been studied with the possibility of applying the idea here.") And, inasmuch as the Park Service was then buying all the land along the river for future parkland, more design restrictions would ensue; pipes from the attached water intake plant would have to be placed underground. The Public Utilities Commission approved the new plant on 5 October 1932.⁷³

The stack question proved to be the most mettlesome – PEPCO wanted three stacks of 225 feet but after a conference between the company and a raft of local and federal agency representatives the plant included only one stack of 180 feet. Even this was announced to aviators as a hazard and marked with red obstruction lights.⁷⁴ At the instance of CFA the exterior decoration was built in limestone instead of the proposed cast stone.

It is perhaps not surprising that PEPCO gave the design/construction of its new plant to the respected engineering firm Stone & Webster of Boston, Massachusetts.

Stone & Webster Engineering Company⁷⁵

The company's picturesque origin lies in the friendship of two MIT electrical engineering graduates, Charles A. Stone and Edwin S. Webster, who saw the growing appetite for electrical power ("during these early years enthusiasm for electricity ran rampant") and in 1889 joined their talents. Their first achievement was development of improved, safer fuse wires, and in 1890 they won their first contract to design a generating plant, at Sacorappa Dam (ME). This was followed in the next decade by a large hydroelectric plant on the Mississippi River in Keokuk (IA) and the entire new generating complex on the Puget Sound (WA).

⁷¹ The Benning plant had gone out of operation twice – in 1914 because of low water in the Anacostia, and in 1933 from high water (Wash. Post, 12 Nov 1933, p. F8).

⁷² Commission of Fine Arts minutes, 18-19 Nov 1932; Evening Star, 21 June 1931, p. 18.

⁷³ PUC minutes, 5 Oct 1932 (p. 759), as PUC No. 3023.

⁷⁴ Wash. Post, 9 Dec 1932, p. 9; Evening Star, 2 Nov 1933, p. 26; CFA minutes, 18 Nov 1932.

⁷⁵ This information taken from Allen, "Stone & Webster"; Stone & Webster, The Story of Stone & Webster; and Keller, Stone & Webster. PEPCO's Benning plant had been designed by J.G. White & Co, of New York (Wash. Post, 17 Feb 1906, p. 2), but a 1946 expansion was Stone & Webster's work, the only other job the company did in Washington by the early 1950s (Building permit, 23 Aug 1946/#288265).

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The partners' business savvy was remarkable. "Stone & Webster went into every phase of the business, installing accounting methods as well as dynamos." It managed street lights and trolley systems. By 1910 14% of all U.S. generating capacity was of Stone & Webster design/construction, both coal- and hydro-powered. World War I saw notable projects by the company, ranging from the significant Hog Island shipyard (PA) to construction of thirty major military bases. "Cantonments, flying fields, arsenals and other government undertakings were constructed at record speed."

Stone & Webster publications could not possibly list even a reasonable portion of its projects,⁷⁶ but highlighted the company's own favorites from the 1920-30s, which give a good idea of the spread of its facilities work: the Conowingo Power Plant on the Susquehanna River (MD); the Osage Dam (MO); the Caribou Powerhouse (CA, the world's highest capacity in 1921); the Edgar Steam Electric Station (MA, which greatly improved efficiency); the Rock Island Dam (WA). In 1932 8% of American hydropower capacity and 10% of steam power came with Stone & Webster projects.

Other construction projects included a plant for U.S. Rubber Company, university laboratories and class buildings, a factory for fabrics, warehouses, churches, banks, a sugar refinery, an oil terminal, underground transmission lines, a tunnel, a yeast production plant, a natural gas pipeline, chemical factories, and a hydropower project in Japan. The company estimated the total value of its construction to 1932 at \$1 billion dollars.

Besides design and construction, Stone & Webster entered a wide range of financial, management and consulting services. In the 1920s it managed 59 utility companies in 18 states, but was forced by federal legislation to divest itself of these in 1935. It began to acquire related companies in 1930, becoming a holding company. It established a petroleum division in 1939 and, along with many, many jobs during World War II (including development of a commercial synthetic rubber process), it participated in Project X at Oak Ridge (TN).

Many Stone & Webster executives became prominent in business, technical and non-profit endeavors after leaving the company. However, the firm had an especially close relationship with PEPCO. In 1933, while the Buzzard Point Plant was under construction, Stone & Webster Vice President Dr. William McClellan became President of PEPCO. During the 1930s, PEPCO's executive ranks were thick with Stone & Webster alumni, one of whom, Allan G. Neal, succeeded McClellan in 1939.⁷⁷

Construction of the Buzzard Point plant (the southern portion of the present building, facing V Street) commenced in October 1932.⁷⁸ The architect was George R. Wryen, presumably a company designer. PEPCO inaugurated the facility on 16 November 1933 with a lunch for government and business elites. The cost totaled \$4 million⁷⁹ and generated 35 megawatts from turbines, but was planned for increase to 250 MW capacity. When the local chapter of the American Association of Engineers visited a few months later the visitors declared the plant "a model of efficiency," incorporating numerous improvements over past systems. Contemporary accounts did not mention the associated

⁷⁶ The Buzzard Point plant, although coming at a very slack period in its business, does not appear in its lists of significant accomplishments.

⁷⁷ BECK, 105, 108-110.

⁷⁸ Building permits, 15 Mar 1933/#161300; 29 Apr 1933/#162359. The long strings of construction inspection reports attached to both allow minute tracking of the progress

⁷⁹ All sources give the anticipated cost as \$5 million; perhaps the newspaper article was mistaken.

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water intake plant built at the same time.⁸⁰ A small gatehouse, of the same materials and style as the plant, sits at the northwest corner of the original building; it cannot be dated but seems contemporaneous.

A Washington Post profile beamed over this addition to the city's infrastructure: "Architecturally, the new structure, by its simple lines and pleasing proportions, would ornament any part of the city. Even the stack of light brick which indicates the purpose of the building adds to its attractiveness. . . What impresses the visitor to this modern plant is the bigness of everything . . . Simplicity and safety have been guiding principles with the engineers . . . Precautions have been taken against the hazards of lubricating-oil fires, incident to the high temperature of steam operating the turbine generators."⁸¹

Stone & Webster also provided the first addition to the plant in 1939-40,⁸² taking capacity to 120 MW at an expense of \$5 million. After the completion of the addition, the Buzzard Point Power Plant was PEPCO's largest plant. Additional turbines installed in 1942 and 1945 yielded a total capacity of 270 MW. The intake plant also saw some upgrades. An uninviting open coal yard lay adjacent to the plant, and occupied as much acreage.⁸³

Further expansion of the plant (outside the surrounding building) eventually saw its generating capacity rise to 380 MW, divided between Buzzard Point Combustion Turbine Plant East and West. It was converted to oil-powered combustion turbines in 1968 but then used less and less until it was largely taken off-line in 2012.

The New, Desolate Buzzard Point

The NCPPC's plans cannot be said to have destroyed the old, semi-rural Buzzard Point because it was rapidly disappearing in any case,⁸⁴ but they failed to establish the area as a center for industrial use. More railroad tracks were laid in 1939 and 1942. Commented Commission member Nolan on the latter occasion: "The area is already becoming crowded with spur tracks."⁸⁵ The area's population had dwindled to near zero – a few people lived on boats.⁸⁶

Other proposed uses, often distasteful, came and went: a trash transfer station, a "penal wharf", a city-owned gravel plant, and that perennial losing-idea commercial and pleasure wharves.⁸⁷ A commercial (as opposed to members-only private) marina, Buzzard Point Boat Yard, was established immediately south of the power plant in 1945; the Corinthian Yacht Club lost the lease on its federally-owned location in 1964 for refusing membership to an African-

⁸⁰ Evening Star, 17 Nov 1933, p. 3; Wash. Post, 25 Feb 1934, p. 20. A detailed discussion of the project's labor cost will be found in Evening Star, 13 Nov 1933, p. 17.

⁸¹ Wash. Post, 12 Nov 1933, p. F8. A fine set of photos of all aspects of the original plant and with it several additions will be found in the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, the Theodor Horydczak photos.

⁸² Building permits, 8 Nov 1939/#227892; 31 Dec 1941/#250089, both with letters of approval from the PUC.

⁸³ Wash. Post, 17 July 1939, p. 17; 25 Jan 1940, p. 20; Evening Star, 26 June 1940, p. 25; 21 Aug 1945, p. 12; 10 May 1946, p. 23. Evening Star, 30 May 1943, p. 22 has a good photograph of the interior; 10 May 1946, p. 23 of the coal yard.

⁸⁴ There surely was no resident population after 1940, and the lovely old house at the point itself, mentioned in several news items as dating from 1800, can be seen burning in an aerial photo of the early 1930s (Special Collections of the National Defense University Library)

⁸⁵ NCPPC minutes, 19-20 Dec 1942.

⁸⁶ Wash. Post, 14 Apr 1950, p. 21 has a photo of the census enumerator talking with residents of one of these boats, which appears to be more a yacht than a working vessel.

⁸⁷ (Trash) Evening Star, 17 July 1934, p. 20; Evening Star, 16 Oct 1944, p. 18 (penal) Wash. Post, 26 Apr 1939, p. 15; (gravel) Wash. Post, 14 July 1940, p. 1; (wharves) Wash. Post, 9 Aug 1939, p. 13; Evening Star, 14 Apr 1946, p. C5.

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American applicant and disbanded, to be replaced by the James Creek Marina in 1991.⁸⁸ In fact, through the 1940s and '50s most newspaper items relating to Buzzard Point pertained to boats (sales, repairs) and boating (regattas, club parties, drownings).

The venerable Hall's Restaurant moved to the Point in 1961, displaced from its 7th and K Streets SW location, and is still remembered there by some; it closed in 1971. During World War II the area between Ft. McNair and 2nd Street, over Canal Street and the old canal bed, was acquired from the District by the War Department and entirely covered with wooden temporary government buildings, only demolished when the Fort expanded eastward in 1985 and again in 2004.

A developer purchased the land just southwest of the power plant (some land owned by the Corinthian Yacht Club, the old Hall's Restaurant site and some adjoining parcels including an auto junkyard) in 1967 for apartments. He engaged well-known local architect Cholthiel Woodard Smith for the project but nothing came of it.⁸⁹ The few scruffy small warehouses and other miscellaneous buildings one encounters in Buzzard Point now – all north of the power plant between South Capitol and First Streets, and a few others just south of Q Street – date from the 1940-60s. Two large and intrusive office buildings adjacent to the river are from the 1970s.

⁸⁸ (Corinthian) Wash. Post, 23 May 1964, p. A1; (James) Wash. Post, 21 Apr 1991, p. C17.

⁸⁹ Wash. Post, 5 Oct 1964, p. B1; 23 Aug 1967, p. B1.

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Newspapers

Afro-American
Critic-Record
Daily Union
Evening Star
National Republican

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Washington Herald
Washington Post
Washington Times (sometimes *Evening Times*)

Maps

Baist Plat maps
Other maps referenced in-text can be found on the Library of Congress website:

[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/gmd:@FIELD\(SUBJ+@band\(+Real+property++Washington++D+C++++Maps++\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/gmd:@FIELD(SUBJ+@band(+Real+property++Washington++D+C++++Maps++)))

or in Kraft, Old Southwest.

Documents/Manuscripts

US Census figures
Metropolitan Police annual reports
District of Columbia building permits
City Directories
NCPC files (at National Archives, Record Group 328)
Ft. McNair History files (at National Defense University Library, Special Collections)
Commission on Fine Arts files (at CFA)
Public Utilities Commission files (at Public Services Commission)

Kraft, Brian D., Old Southwest: A History of a Vanished Neighborhood. MS. 2006 (at Washingtoniana Div. of ML King Library)

Heritage US, "Historic Utility System Study – Washington, D.C." Washington, DC. 1998. (at Historic Preservation Office)

PEPCO, "1992 Integrated Least-Cost Resource Plan" (Vol. I "Main Volume"; and Appendix Vol. G "Operating Information as of 1992"). MS. 1992. (at Washingtoniana Div. of ML King Library)

Consultants

Ms. Susan Lemke, National Defense University Library, Special Collections
Mr. Mike Ewall, Energy Justice Network

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

| | | | | | | | |
|---|------|---------|----------|---|------|---------|----------|
| 1 | Zone | Easting | Northing | 3 | Zone | Easting | Northing |
| 2 | | | | 4 | | | |

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Hayden M. Wetzel
Organization DC Preservation League date _____
street & number 1221 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 5A telephone (202) 783-5144
city or town Washington state DC zip code 20036

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 SHPO or FPO)

name PEPCO
street & number 701 9th Street NW telephone (202) 872-6280
city or town Washington state DC zip code 20001-4572

Paperwork Reduction 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 the 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 Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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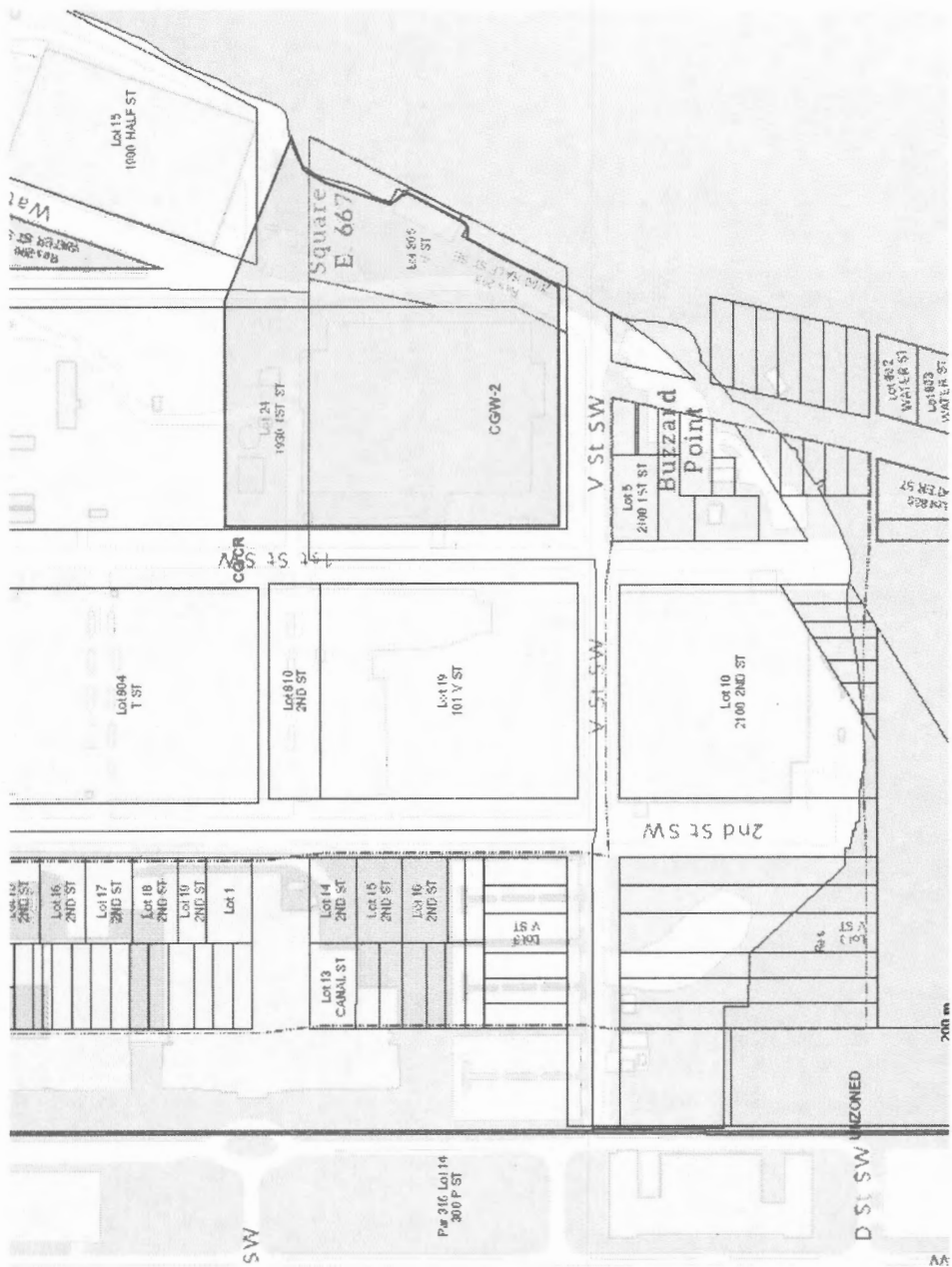
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Verbal Boundary Description:

The area of the power plant building, being square 667 (V to U Streets, and Half to First Streets, SW; and the adjoining water intake plant (The Matthew Henson Conservation Corps) in the same square but alongside the Anacostia River on the east side of Half Street.

Boundary Justification:

This boundary includes the 1933 and 1940 art modern plant and associated water intake plant but not the later equipment added outside the building.



Boundary Map, 1930 1ST STREET, SW, Square 0665/ Lot 0024 & Square 0667E/ Lot 0805, Source: DC Property Quest, <http://propertyquest.dc.gov/>, Accessed: April 14, 2016

National Register Buzzard Point PEPCO Plant Photo Log – Washington, DC

000 of 012

| Number | Description | Camera Facing | Photographer | Date |
|---------------|---|----------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| 001 | Inscription over entrance, south façade, close-up | North | D.P. Sefton | 3/9/2014 |
| 002 | Entrance, south facade | North | D.P. Sefton | 3/9/2014 |
| 003 | South facade | North | D.P. Sefton | 3/9/2014 |
| 004 | Frieze details, northeast corner of south facade | North | D.P. Sefton | 3/9/2014 |
| 005 | Smokestacks, west facade | Northeast | D.P. Sefton | 3/9/2014 |
| 006 | North and west facades | Southeast | D.P. Sefton | 3/9/2014 |
| 007 | North and east facades showing railroad tracks | Southwest | D.P. Sefton | 3/9/2014 |
| 008 | East facade | Southwest | D.P. Sefton | 3/9/2014 |
| 009 | Water Intake Station | Southeast | D.P. Sefton | 3/9/2014 |
| 010 | West façade from First Street SW | Southeast | D.P. Sefton | 4/9/2014 |
| 011 | East and north façades with transformers | South | D.P. Sefton | 4/9/2014 |
| 012 | Railroad tracks on Half Street SW and east facade | South | D.P. Sefton | 4/9/2014 |

BUZZARD POINT

PLANT

BUZZARD POINT PLANT

ATTENTION:
Area Monitored By
Surveillance Camera

DANGER

ELECTRICAL HAZARD
ELECTRIC SHOCK
PERSONNEL ONLY

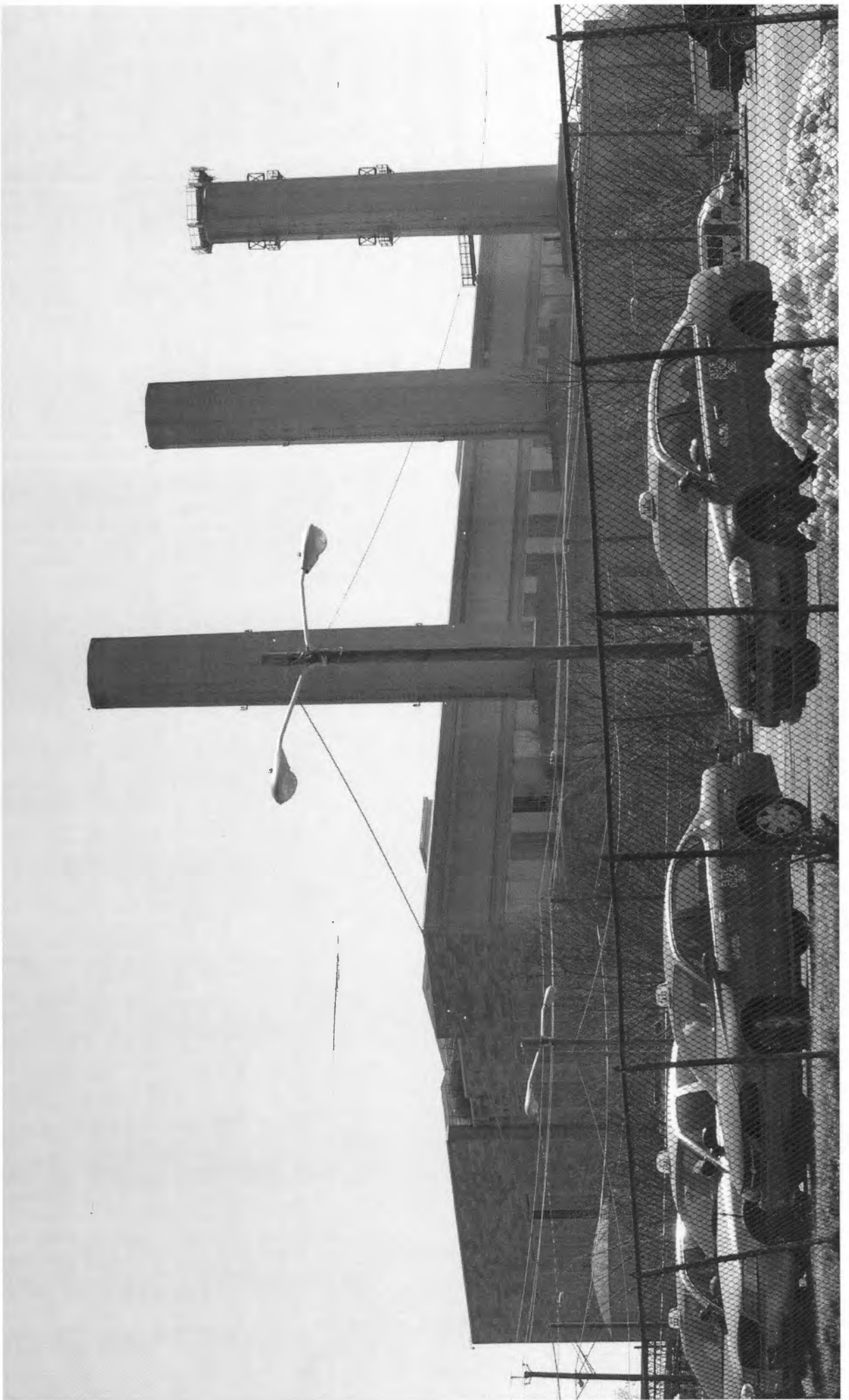
NO
CAMERAS
PERMITTED



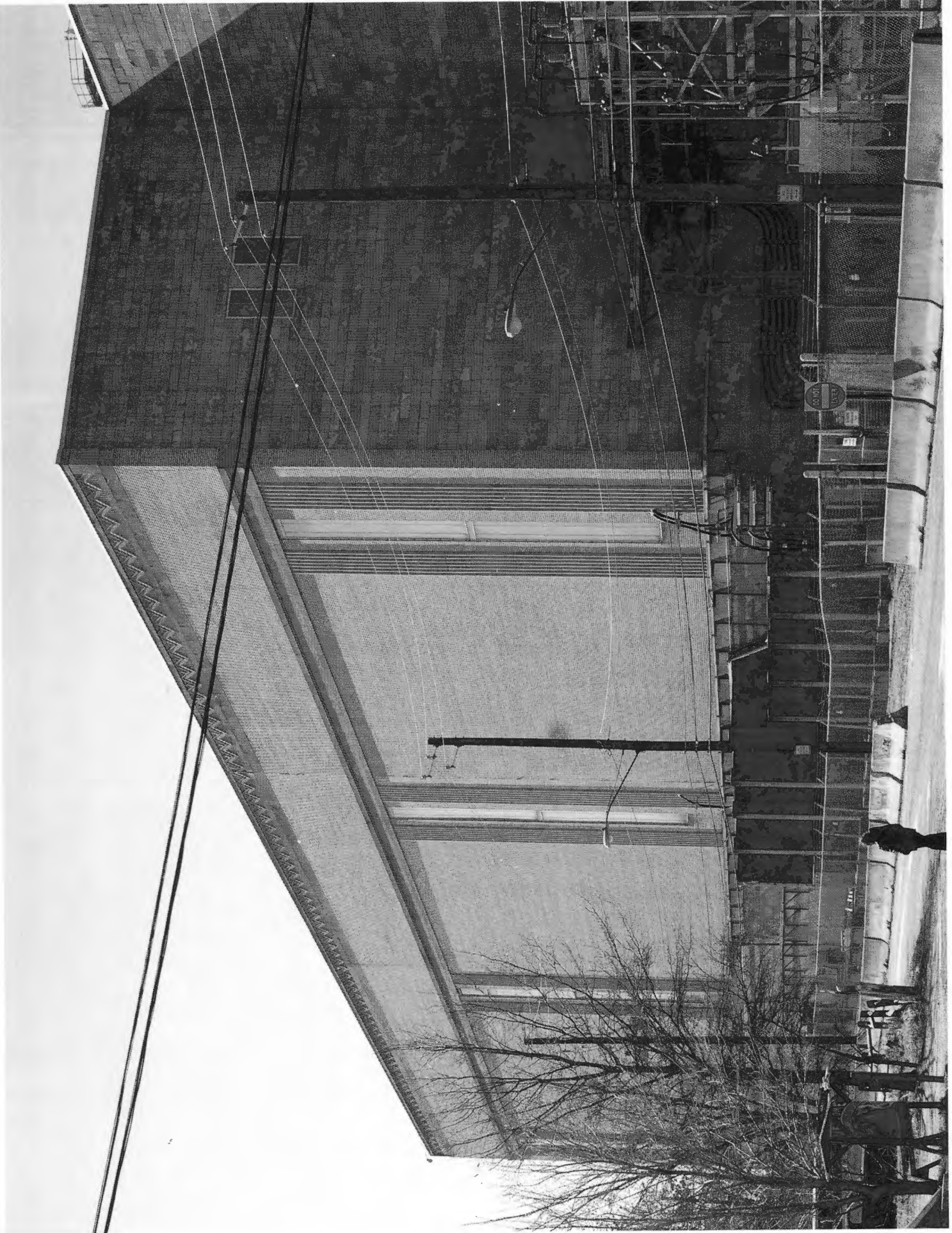














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