
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic District Case No. 14-12

George Washington/Old West End Historic District

Meeting Date: October 2, 2014
Applicant: DC Historic Preservation Office
Affected ANC: ANC 2A
Staff Reviewer: Kim Williams

After careful consideration, the Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the George Washington/Old West End Historic District to the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites. It is further recommended that the historic district nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places for listing at the local level of significance under Criteria A and C with a Period of Significance from 1800 to 1951, inclusive.

Preservation Background

In 2006, The George Washington University prepared a campus plan document called the *Foggy Bottom Campus Plan 2006-2025*. This campus plan includes an historic preservation component that provides for the identification and designation of Historic Landmarks and a National Register-listed Historic District; the development of design guidelines for the historic district; and design and maintenance guidelines for the University-owned Historic Landmarks and buildings within the Historic District. The University has completed the nomination of the five historic landmarks under its ownership, but was not envisioned as the sponsor of the historic district nomination. Since publication of the plan, the DC HPO has worked with the University and other property owners while developing a historic district nomination, along with historic district guidelines. The DC HPO is the applicant for the district nomination and in the interim, has been working with the University on its development projects within the proposed historic district boundaries. Most recently, the Board also reviewed the conversion of three contributing apartment buildings to a new dormitory within the proposed district.

Site Description/Boundaries

The George Washington/Old West End Historic District is located in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood in northwest Washington, D.C. and encompasses the historic core of The George Washington University as well as other buildings outside the university boundaries. The irregularly shaped district spans approximately twelve full or partial city blocks west of the White House and east of 23rd Street. Historically known as the West End, the area was one of Washington's premier residential neighborhoods in the early to mid-19th century and still contains some of the city's finest pre-Civil War dwellings. The Historic District is physically bounded by I (Eye) Street on the north, 22rd Street on the west, Virginia Avenue on the southwest and 20th Street and 19th Street on the east. The district consists of 125 buildings (116 contributing, 9 non-contributing), including 19th and early 20th century buildings from the mixed-use neighborhood, plus those buildings constructed by the University, together forming the core of The George Washington University campus. In addition, the district includes two sites, Reservations 28 and 29, located between 20th and 21st streets north and south of

Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, respectively. Fifteen properties (consisting of 33 individual resources) within the historic district are currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Historical Overview

The George Washington University, originally called Columbian College, was chartered by Congress in 1821, belatedly fulfilling President George Washington's desire to establish an institution of higher education in the nation's capital. During the late 19th century, the University began to establish a presence in the city's business district, and in 1912, it moved from its original "College Hill" campus in present-day Columbia Heights to the city's West End neighborhood (this historic West End designation is not to be confused with the area currently known as the West End and located north of Pennsylvania Avenue). This move was at the instigation of University Trustee Maxwell Van Zandt Woodhull who lived at 2033 G Street NW and who was aware of affordable space in the neighborhood.

Historically, 23rd Street formed a cultural divide in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood. To the west of the street was an industrial and working-class residential area, and to the east (located just west of the White House) was the West End, one of the most prestigious residential areas in the city up to the mid-19th century. Within the West End, F and G Streets were particularly notable for being home to military officers and high-ranking governmental officials. On G Street in 1855, for instance Maxwell Woodhull, a naval officer with valuable real estate holdings in the city, built a robust Italianate villa as his residence that his son, Maxwell Van Zandt Woodhull, an army general, would later donate to the University. The Woodhull house, along with several other early-to mid-19th century dwellings nearby, such as the Margaret Wetzel house, the Steedman-Ray house, and the Whitney-Lawson houses, still survive as some of the oldest residential buildings left in downtown. While the former owners of these houses represented the city's socially elite, their households consisted of persons at the other end of the spectrum, namely resident servants, cooks, bakers, nurses, coachmen and other household employees, the majority of whom were listed in census records as either "black" or "mulatto."

Indeed, a close review of the 1860 Census reveals that the West End was home not only to the wealthy, but to their in-residence domestics and other persons of more modest means, including sizeable Irish and free African American populations. Some of the free blacks had amassed relatively significant assets given their social standing. For example, the African-American residents of the 2100 block of F Street included a seamstress whose real estate was valued at \$1,500 and a wagoner whose property was valued at \$1,000. The neighborhood was also home to Leonard Grimes (1815-1873) who lived at the northeast corner of 22nd and H Streets, NW and operated a successful coach and transportation business there before the Civil War. Grimes, who supposedly used his property as a stop on the Underground Railroad, was eventually caught and imprisoned, and later moved to Boston where he became an Abolitionist.

Over time, as the city's burgeoning population created a demand for new housing, Foggy Bottom's West End model of freestanding houses gave way to speculative row house development that defined much of the city's growing residential neighborhoods. Government employees and white-collar professionals purchased and moved into the newly emerging rows of brick houses. Many of these new residents worked at the State, War and Navy Office or at the Treasury Department, both of which were within walking distance. Area residents also found ready employment at nearby Foggy Bottom industries and services. As the population increased, schools, churches, and commercial enterprises arose, providing residents with everyday goods and services. In 1882, the population had increased sufficiently to justify construction of the

Grant School, and by 1910, the still-active Engine Company #23 became the neighborhood's newest amenity.

After its 1912 move to Foggy Bottom, The George Washington University increasingly defined the character of the neighborhood. It expanded beyond its first quarters in the rented Rose Industrial School by adapting row houses for academic uses, administrative offices, and residence halls. During the 1920s, the University developed its first campus plan, designed by Albert Harris, a well-respected architect in the city, professor of architecture at the university, and the city's newly appointed Municipal Architect. This campus plan, known as the Harris Plan, envisioned a central University Quadrangle around which a series of eight buildings would be constructed in the square bounded by G, H, 20th and 21st Streets. The first of these, Corcoran and Stockton Halls, begun in 1924, were located opposite one another on the Quadrangle with entrances opening on both the street and quadrangle sides of the buildings. Designed in a red brick, institutional Colonial Revival style, the buildings were meant to set the architectural tone for the Quadrangle (later University Yard). As it happened, the Depression and other factors stalled completion of the Quadrangle as planned. By the time construction had resumed in the mid-to-late 1930s, the University had embraced a more Modernist aesthetic in keeping with the period. Bell Hall, Stuart Hall and Lisner Hall, all designed in the late 1930s to frame the southern end of the Quadrangle, respect the red brick Colonial character begun by Albert Harris, but in a much more reduced, stripped-down and proto-Modern manner. The University continued its modern proclivities with the hire of architect Waldron Faulkner to design several of its buildings including the Hall of Government (1938), Lisner Library (1939), Lisner Auditorium (1942), and James Monroe Hall (1951).

Although the University was not building anew during the late 1920s and early 1930s due to the Depression, it began under President Lloyd Heck Marvin, a major period of expansion by acquiring historic properties in Foggy Bottom, and ultimately building new buildings that continued throughout his presidency and that define the architectural character of the University today.

Architecture

The George Washington/Old West End Historic District consists of 125 buildings (116 contributing, 9 non-contributing), two federal reservations, designed landscapes and open spaces. For the most part, the district can be defined by its various building types, including 19th and early 20th century residential, commercial, civic and religious buildings from the neighborhood's 19th-century mixed-use history, plus those institutional buildings constructed by the University forming the core of The George Washington University campus.

Of particular note are the district's oldest buildings which are remnants of the once-fashionable neighborhood defined by imposing, freestanding urban dwellings. Built just west of the White House, these houses reflect a variety of architectural styles—Federal, Greek Revival and Italianate—and display the skillful design and quality craftsmanship that convey the affluence of their owners. Most of the surviving buildings have been designated DC Historic Landmarks based on their individual architectural distinction. They are among the oldest and most distinguished buildings in the historic district, and are excellent examples of their particular architectural styles.

The University buildings are similarly noteworthy as part of a collection and for individual distinction. The first buildings to be constructed, Corcoran Hall (1924) and Stockton Hall (1925), exemplify the University's first master plan (the Harris Plan) as well as an institutional

Georgian Revival style that was typical of institutional architecture of the early 20th century. Subsequent buildings constructed by the University exhibit a more Modernist aesthetic, including the local Modern icon, Lisner Auditorium (1942) designed by Waldron Faulkner. In addition to its buildings, the University offers designed landscapes and open spaces, including the Quad, the campus's largest open area designed as part of GWU's first master plan. It is lined by a series of historic red-brick academic buildings in the Colonial Revival and Modern styles, with brick pathways traversing grassy expanses and benches located under the shade of mature trees.

The district also includes a fine collection of rowhouses, apartment buildings, and a small but notable collection of civic and religious buildings, including the Grant School, Engine Company 23, and two churches (Concordia United Church of Christ, and the Union Methodist Church). These buildings, constructed during the late 19th and early 20th centuries prior to the establishment of the university in Foggy Bottom, provided for the civic and religious needs of neighborhood residents. As was typical of civic and religious buildings of the era, these structures embody high standards of design and construction and had symbolic value in conveying stability, permanence, and civic pride.

Evaluation and Integrity

The George Washington/Old West End Historic District meets D.C. Designation Criteria A (Events), B (History), D (Architecture and Urbanism), E (Artistry) and F (Creative Masters), and National Register of Historic Places Criteria A (association with events that have made a significant contribution the broad patterns of our history) and C (embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic value).

Historically, the historic district is significant for its associations with the development of The George Washington University, chartered by Congress in 1821 to fulfill President Washington's desire to establish an institution of higher education in the nation's capital. In 1912, the University moved from present-day Columbia Heights to the West End/Foggy Bottom neighborhood where it established an important institutional presence in the then primarily residential neighborhood.

Architecturally, the district is significant for its collection of high-style pre-Civil War dwellings; its late 19th-century Victorian-era rowhouses; its early to mid-20th century apartment buildings; and its purpose-built university buildings. The early buildings, representing the Federal, Greek Revival and Italianate styles, present a high quality of design and materials commensurate with the neighborhood's then upper-class socio-economic status. The district's rowhouses reflect a range of Victorian-era styles, and were designed by some of the city's most well-known and respected architects and builders of the period. Similarly, the district's apartment buildings represent a variety of apartment types, sizes and forms and are representative of apartment building design city-wide. In addition, the district contains a number of other building types, including schools, churches, a fire house and commercial buildings, all of which are executed in different styles and all of which contribute to the architectural character of the district.

The Historic District's period of significance is from circa 1800, the approximate date of the construction of the Lenthall Houses, the earliest houses in the district, to 1951, inclusive, the date of the completion of Monroe Hall, the last building constructed under the University's Marvin Plan.