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## HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Designation Case No. 17-04

### Smithsonian Quadrangle Historic District

950 and 1050 Independence Avenue SW

Parcel 316, Part of Lot 6

Meeting Date: April 27, 2017  
Applicant: Committee of 100 on the Federal City  
Affected ANC: 2C

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The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the Smithsonian Quadrangle as a historic district in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites, with a period of significance from 1847 to 1987. The office further recommends that a nomination for the historic district be forwarded for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, in coordination with the Smithsonian Institution.

#### Overview

The Smithsonian Quadrangle Historic District comprises a group of four buildings in a campus-like setting on the south side of the National Mall. The elements forming the quadrangle are the Smithsonian Institution Building (1847-55), the Arts and Industries Building (1879-81), the Freer Gallery of Art (1923), and the largely underground Quadrangle Building (1983-87), with its associated Enid A. Haupt Garden. The Quadrangle Building houses the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, National Museum of African Art, and S. Dillon Ripley Center, each with its above-ground entrance pavilion. The Haupt Garden covering the main roof of the building also includes associated objects such as the Renwick Gates, the Downing Urn, and nineteenth century lampposts and garden furnishings from the Bicentennial Victorian Garden that once occupied a portion of the site.

The proposed historic district lies entirely within the National Mall Historic District, and all four of its main structures are considered contributing resources to the National Mall. The three oldest buildings in the Quadrangle complex are also individually listed in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register, for architectural and historical significance in their own right. The Smithsonian Institution and Arts and Industries buildings are also designated National Historic Landmarks, the highest official historic recognition. The significance of these early properties, briefly described here, is fully discussed in their individual nominations.

#### Historic Context

The Smithsonian Institution was chartered by Congress in 1846, due to a generous bequest by James Smithson, an English scientist. The red Seneca sandstone building constructed to house the collection was designed by architect James Renwick, known also for his design of Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York City and the former Corcoran Gallery of Art (now the Renwick Gallery). Affectionately known as the Smithsonian "Castle," this picturesque structure originally housed not just the multiple functions of the institution, but also the living quarters of its

Secretary. Now the symbolic center of the world's largest museum, education, and research complex, the Castle remains the icon of a global Institution, housing the office of the Secretary, notable treasures, and visitor orientation facilities.

The Arts and Industries Building is considered the best-preserved example in the United States of 19<sup>th</sup>-century "world's fair" or "exposition" type architecture, constructed to house the international exhibits left over from the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876. The building, funded by an Act of Congress at the request of the Smithsonian, was designed by the prominent Washington architecture firm of Adolf Cluss and Paul Schulze, and sits just east of the Castle, respectfully recessed from the original building. The building opened in 1881 as the first United States National Museum.

The Freer Gallery of Art was constructed for Charles Lang Freer's personal collection of American and Asian art. A wealthy Detroit manufacturer of freight cars, Freer devoted the last fifteen years of his life to assembling the nation's most outstanding collection of Asian art, and offered it along with a sizeable endowment to the United States, with the provision that a suitable building be constructed to house it. The building, designed by prominent architect, landscape designer, and artist Charles Adams Platt, was erected on the west side of the Castle, also in a respectful recessed position. It opened as the Smithsonian's first museum devoted exclusively to the fine arts.

The Quadrangle Building is situated in the midst of these three older Smithsonian landmarks, occupying the area historically known as the "South Yard." For many years, the Castle and its sparsely planted back yard served as an incubator for fledgling museums and research programs. Over time, the yard became a convenient place for various utilitarian structures and uses. In the 1870s, it served as a museum construction yard; in the 1880s, bison were kept in a paddock, awaiting the opening of the National Zoo in 1889. After the bison left, an astrophysical observatory was built, followed by various sheds and annexes. A taxidermist shop appeared in 1917, and the same year, the Army erected a metal building for wartime repair of aircraft engines. By 1920, that structure was repurposed with public displays as the Aircraft Building, and in 1946, it became the National Air Museum, whose public displays grew to include a startling outdoor collection of rockets.

The 1960s urban renewal of Southwest, and its transformation of Independence Avenue into a formal row of federal office buildings, rendered the jumble of the South Yard embarrassingly obsolete. The Smithsonian's new Secretary, S. Dillon Ripley, who was designated in 1964 and would become one of the institution's most influential leaders, began to envision the Yard as a more formal space in keeping with the redeveloped Independence Avenue.

A sequence of events made such a transformation possible, also influencing how the Yard would be reused. Construction of the National Air and Space Museum (1976) enabled the relocation of the old air museum and its rockets. They were replaced by a Victorian garden celebrating the bicentennial, with period elements that enhanced the Castle and Arts and Industries buildings. Secretary Ripley was already contemplating the need for underground storage to relieve acute space constraints at the Freer Gallery, and soon he was courting Arthur Sackler to donate his extensive collection of Asian and Islamic Art to the Smithsonian.

An erudite and widely-traveled ornithologist and former foreign intelligence officer, Ripley was deeply concerned that the United States was not doing enough to build mutual respect among cultures, and from the start he wanted to use his position at the Smithsonian to expand its multi-cultural collections and programs. He was also devoted to the vision of the Smithsonian Institution as a scholarly institution dedicated to the “increase and diffusion” of knowledge. The authorization by Congress in 1978 to acquire the Museum of African Art, begun in Washington by former foreign service officer Warren Robbins, gave Ripley the final piece he needed to advocate for a new international center—a center for African, Near Eastern, and Asian Cultures—worthy of its location at the heart of the Smithsonian. During the 1970s and 1980s, Ripley would champion the creation of this center, running it through the gauntlet of politicians, architects, donors, and review agencies essential to making the project a reality. Making a virtue out of the necessity of further expansion in the vicinity of the Castle, he would bring to fruition what he came to call the Quadrangle, no doubt aware of the term’s academic connotations.

Japanese architect Junzo Yoshimura, hired in 1977 to develop a fully integrated plan for a building in the South Yard, was the first to conceptualize the Quadrangle as a subterranean building with a surface level that incorporated culturally referential gardens and entrance pavilions. Such a *parti* would protect and enhance the setting of the Castle by creating a more intimate setting shielded from the traffic and massive concrete facades across Independence Avenue.

In 1980, the American architectural team of Shepley Bulfinch Richardson & Abbott (SBRA) was hired to implement Yoshimura’s design. SBRA, with Jean Paul Carlhian as the principal designer, ultimately became the sole design team as Yoshimura progressively disengaged and then resigned from the project, due, in part, to deteriorating health. Given Carlhian’s significant redesign of the building as conceived by Yoshimura, Jean Paul Carlhian is credited as the principal designer of the Quadrangle Building. Carlhian’s key collaborator in designing the Haupt Garden was landscape architect Lester A. Collins.

The Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission played key roles in reviewing the design of the project. For seven years, between the initial stages of design until the building’s completion, the design review bodies critiqued and approved the complex, element by element. The Haupt Garden, the finishing touch, opened to the public in May 1987, followed in September by the underground museum spaces.

### **Physical Description**

The proposed Smithsonian Quadrangle Historic District is bounded by Jefferson Drive on the north, Independence Avenue on the south, the perimeter wall of the Hirshhorn Museum on the east, and the wall of the 12th Street Expressway on the west.<sup>1</sup> Included within the boundaries are the four buildings discussed above. In addition to the Enid A. Haupt Garden, there are also two smaller gardens: the Mary Livingston Ripley Garden (1981) on the east side of the Arts and Industries Building, and the Katherine Dulin Folger Rose Garden (1998), which extends from the east door of the Castle to the north entrance of the Arts and Industries Building. All three gardens are considered part of the landscape setting for the buildings.

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<sup>1</sup> The nomination proposed the centerlines of the underground 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Street expressways as east and west boundaries. Instead of these indeterminate subsurface boundaries, the recommended boundaries are drawn at distinguishable on-grade physical elements.

The Smithsonian Castle defines the central north-south axis of the Quadrangle Historic District, with the roughly balancing Arts and Industries Building and Freer Gallery establishing a secondary east-west relationship. The above-grade pavilions of the Quadrangle Building complete the architectural quadrangle, and the highly designed central landscape of the Haupt Garden draws the collection of disparate buildings into an integrated urban composition.

The Renwick Gates and the entrance pavilions to the underground museums frame the view of the Smithsonian Castle from Independence Avenue along the north-south axis of the Quadrangle and Haupt Garden. Occupying this axis is a wide floral parterre, rendered in a Gardenesque manner, extending from the Renwick Gates to the Castle's south entrance. Rows of flowering trees flank the parterre on the east and west sides, shading Victorian benches alternating with lampposts. An east-west cross-axis extends from the entrance of the Arts and Industries Building, linking the central parterre to two smaller side garden "rooms," each designed to relate to its corresponding art museum entry pavilion through axial arrangements and views. These side gardens feature elements inspired by Chinese and North African-influenced garden design, respectively.

The remaining areas of the Haupt garden are laid out with an encircling network of red-brick walkways that stretch from Independence Avenue to the Mall, lined with benches and lampposts, and linking various building entrances. Scattered discreetly through the garden are Red Seneca sandstone enclosures for skylights and egress stairs; these enclosures help to shape the space and serve as a foil for lush plantings. The two smaller gardens extend this character to surround the Arts and Industries Building.

### **Evaluation**

The Smithsonian Quadrangle Historic District is one of the most important and most iconic public spaces in Washington. It is eligible for listing in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites under D.C. Designation Criteria A (Events), B (History), C (Individuals), D (Architecture and Urbanism), E (Artistry), and F (Creative Masters) with a Period of Significance of 1847 to 1987, extending from the beginning date of construction of the Smithsonian Institution to the completion of the Quadrangle building.

Under Criteria A and B the four buildings, as an historic district, together represent the establishment and mission of the Smithsonian Institution as a museum and educational institution "for the increase and diffusion of knowledge." The four buildings are associated with the institution from its conception in 1847, through the broadening of its collections and programming to embrace non-Western cultures with the opening of the Freer Gallery in 1923, through the opening of the Quadrangle Building in 1987. The Quadrangle building was constructed to house the Sackler Collection and the National Museum of African Art, whose incorporation into the Smithsonian acknowledged the diverse influences that have shaped art in the United States and enhanced its multi-cultural perspectives. In addition, it accommodated the S. Dillon Ripley Center, which institutionalized Ripley's educational and outreach programs. These important associations with the long history of the Smithsonian Institution give the Smithsonian Quadrangle unique significance as a core element in the identity of the National Mall.

Under D.C. Designation Criterion C, the historic district is eligible for listing in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites for its association with two seminal figures in the history of the Smithsonian Institution: Joseph Henry, the highly acclaimed first Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution who held office from 1846 to 1878, and S. Dillon Ripley, Secretary of the Smithsonian who served from 1964 to 1984. Joseph Henry an esteemed 19<sup>th</sup> century physicist and early pioneer in electromagnetics charted the course of the Smithsonian, establishing it as a great research center. As Secretary, Joseph Henry worked, lived and died in the Castle; his private quarters where he lived with his family were located in the east wing. S. Dillon Ripley, indisputably an accomplished and revered Secretary of the Smithsonian and described in the nomination as “arguably the most influential Smithsonian Secretary since Joseph Henry” was the prime mover of the Quadrangle development, guiding its progress from his office in the Castle.

Under Ripley’s tenure, many other major buildings were constructed by the Smithsonian, including the Air and Space Museum, the Hirshhorn Museum, and five structures at the National Zoo. In addition, the former Patent Office became the National Portrait Gallery and the Museum of American Art; the original Corcoran Museum was re-made as the Renwick Gallery; and the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum and Folklife Festival were launched. Although creation of the Quadrangle is just one of many achievements that shaped the Smithsonian under Ripley’s leadership, it is often considered his crowning achievement, due to his personal engagement and its embodiment of his vision for expansion of the Smithsonian’s multi-cultural collections and educational programs.

The Smithsonian Quadrangle Historic District meets D.C. Designation Criteria D and E for architecture and urbanism, and for artistry. The Quadrangle includes a collection of architecturally striking buildings reflecting different periods and styles, but with shared historic associations that, by virtue of the 1987 Quadrangle Building, form a distinct physical entity. Although architecturally exceptional in their own right, the Castle, the Freer, and Arts and Industries had stood only incidentally related to each other before construction of the Quadrangle Building. After the Quadrangle Building’s construction, the axial relationship of the Haupt Garden to the surrounding buildings raised their stature and relationship to the surrounding city, visually emphasizing the historical associations between them, and rendering the whole greater than the sum of the parts.

The Quadrangle Building provided an innovative underground design scheme whose primary objective of preserving views to the Castle, and open space around it, was critical to its success. By placing the museum rooms underground and a formal garden above, the designers created an entirely new landscaped space that was not only compatible with the historic and iconic buildings on the site, but also one that unified the group of buildings into a distinctive and meaningful collection. The Quadrangle entry pavilions are architecturally distinct from, but sympathetic and deferential to the older buildings, evidencing historic preservation principles as guiding tenets of the building’s design. In a further nod to historic preservation, certain design elements of the above-ground features of the Quadrangle, such as the domed and pyramidal roofs, albeit post-Modern Classical and of their own time, recall and harmonize with the forms and details of the older buildings on the site.

Through its contextual design approach, the Quadrangle also epitomizes the influence of historic preservation on late-20<sup>th</sup> century urban design, at one of the most prominent locations in Washington. Along with Constitution Gardens, another product of the Bicentennial era, the

Quadrangle project helped to reintroduce naturalistic landscape design ideas and a more intimate scale of architecture, largely taboo on the Mall during seven decades of monumental classicism under the McMillan Plan, as legitimate in such an environment when the historic context called for them. The renewed appreciation of 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture, sensitivity to context, and understanding of the softening effects of nature are significant values of the era that have enriched the Mall, rendered it more welcoming and humane, and made the Quadrangle one of the most beloved places in the city. The Smithsonian's horticulture program has since expanded such intimate garden spaces into the setting of other buildings along the Mall.

The Smithsonian Quadrangle Historic District meets D.C. Designation Criteria F for Creative Masters for its associations with the impressive array of nationally acclaimed architects, James Renwick, the firm of Cluss & Schulz, Charles Platt, architect Jean Paul Carlhian and his team, and Landscape Architect Lester Collins who, collectively, are responsible for the high caliber of design and execution of the buildings and spaces making up the historic district.

### **National Register Listing**

For the reasons stated above, the Smithsonian Quadrangle Historic District also meets National Register Criteria A, B, and C. The completed Quadrangle complex illustrates an important phase in the growth and evolution of the Smithsonian Institution, and the architecture and landscape design of the Quadrangle serve as the physical manifestation of the institution's broadening mission. The design scheme, which placed the museum below-grade and the garden atop it, unified the disparate parts into a single entity and is a critical and distinctive component of the larger National Mall. Further, the preservation of historic buildings, open places and vistas inherent in the Quadrangle concept, and the international importance of the Smithsonian, make it an exceptional example worthy of recognition.

### **Period of Significance**

The proposed period of significance for the historic district extends from 1847 to 1987. Because the end date is less than fifty years from the present, the historic district nomination applies National Register Criterion G. However, the fact that the period of significance ends less than 50 years ago does not necessitate a finding of exceptional significance, as the period begins more than a century earlier. Further, the three exceptional landmarks that predate the Quadrangle Building and the Quadrangle Building itself are related historically and visually. Even viewed in isolation from the complex surrounding it, the most recent piece, the Haupt Garden, possesses high artistic value comparable to other important designed landscapes of the District of Columbia. It contains some of the oldest elements in the proposed historic district, and its design reinforces a critical north-south visual axis established by the Smithsonian Castle and a previously loose cross axis established by the Arts and Industries Building. Garden elements and the two similar-but-distinct museum entry pavilions were inspired not only by the cultures they represent, but also by the forms and coloration of the adjacent buildings, blending the disparate elements of the district together harmoniously in the public space that unites and serves them.