
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 19-08

Charles R. and Jacquelyn W. Sadler Trust Fund Homestead

7529 Morningside Drive NW

Square 2774, Lot 801

Meeting Date: June 27, 2019
Applicants: Zara Ellis Sadler and Dr. Marc Rankin, property owners
Affected ANC: 4A

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board not designate 7529 Morningside Drive NW a historic landmark in the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites. It is further recommended that the nomination not be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places. The property's degree of significance does not appear to merit its individual designation as a historic landmark.



Background

The neighborhood now known as Shepherd Park was carved from a rural expanse between Rock Creek and the Maryland line generally known as Brightwood during the second half of the nineteenth century. Near the turn of the century, subdivisions bearing that name were developed north of Military Road and Missouri Avenue. As a consequence, developers of adjacent neighborhoods coined new names. Situated on the east side of 16th and overlapping Brightwood was “Sixteenth Street Heights,” which still denotes the area south of Military Road. The area north of Brightwood was renamed “Shepherd Park,” in honor of Alexander Robey “Boss” Shepherd, whose “Bleak House” mansion had stood near what is now the intersection of Floral and 14th Streets. Contractor and developer Lewis E. Breuninger coined the name in 1926, when proposing the construction of 200 single-family homes in the area. In fact, it was first announced in an *Evening Star* advertisement of May 1, 1926, which invited potential purchasers to an open house at the subdivision’s first model home, 7707 13th Street NW.



Lewis A. Breuninger

The parcels between 13th and 14th Streets and Holly Street and Kalmia Road were mostly laid out by Gustav G. Loehler, his son John Gustav Loehler, and builders Lewis T. and Henry L. Breuninger, sons and partners of Lewis E. Breuninger. Their 1926 subdivision resulted in five squares. The reverse-S-curved Morningside Drive slashed diagonally through the subdivision, opening new frontages on the long blocks, and reflecting the later adjustments to the Permanent System of Highways by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and others, more suited to the irregular topography of the suburbs. With another partner, Gustav Loehler had platted the land immediately to the east—around 13th and 12th Streets—two years earlier. Together, these subdivisions comprise about a quarter of the present Shepherd Park neighborhood.

L.E. Breuninger and Sons, Inc. completed the first of the planned 200 homes at 7707 13th Street before May 1926. Like many of its soon-to-be neighbors, it was designed in a free Tudor style, with a stone first floor and a frame second story stuccoed between false half-timbering. A full-width front porch, surmounted by a balustrade, was more reflective of the Colonial Revival. The neighborhood would largely be built in those two popular styles over the next decade. Breuninger and Sons would not quite reach 200 houses in Shepherd Park, but they came close. One obstacle was the economic meltdown that began in 1929. But the staffing up of government agencies in response reinvigorated the local market for homes.

A Colonial Revival house at 7538 Morningside, across the street from the Sadler house, was the Breuninger firm's model home for Shepherd Park in December 1929—the moment that the permit for 7529 Morningside was being issued.¹ Thus, the Sadler house dates about four years into the Shepherd Park development. *The Washington Post* ran a photo of it in its May 25, 1930 issue, noting that the “[b]rick and stucco home of six rooms, two baths and a one-car garage” had been built on a “wide, deep lot”² by L.E. Breuninger and Sons and sold recently to a couple, James A. Pratt and Lillian Bales Pratt. The purchase had occurred four days earlier, with the Pratts assuming a \$3300 mortgage. Oddly, the property reappears in the *Evening Star* real estate section four *months* later (see below), with essentially the same information. It is likely that the Breuningers had placed the plugs, as they surely had some influence with real estate reporters. The house was not nearly the first in the neighborhood, nor even on its block, but it *was* one of the first erected in this section of Shepherd Park after the stock-market crash, and the news items were probably intended as a signal that the Breuningers' development was again a going concern, despite the Depression.

The house's design is attributed to Henry L. Breuninger, who is listed as architect on most of the company's permits. A mildly interesting footnote is that, at the time 7529 Morningside's building permit was pending, an architects' “council,” composed of members of the local chapter of the A.I.A., was advising the District on designs for new construction. The Morningside house was one of several “approved” designs in December, 1929. Not too much significance should be assigned to this, as a smaller number of other projects were not merely “approved,” but were “commended” or found to be “distinguished.”³

The new owners of 7529 Morningside, James and Lillian Pratt, had both been born in Virginia around 1895-1896. By the age of 20, James was a film operator in Harry Crandall's Metropolitan Theater. By 1930, when he bought the Shepherd Park house, he was an electrical engineer for the Warner Brothers circuit. He may have been affiliated with the local branch of Paramount Pictures around 1936, but by 1940, the U.S. census records that he was now an executive in wholesale drug sales. Two decades later, he was affiliated with the Motion Picture Association, and in 1950s, he received three patents related to movie projectors.⁴ Lillian was a secretary for a Virginia Congressman in the early 1920s, served in the same capacity for the

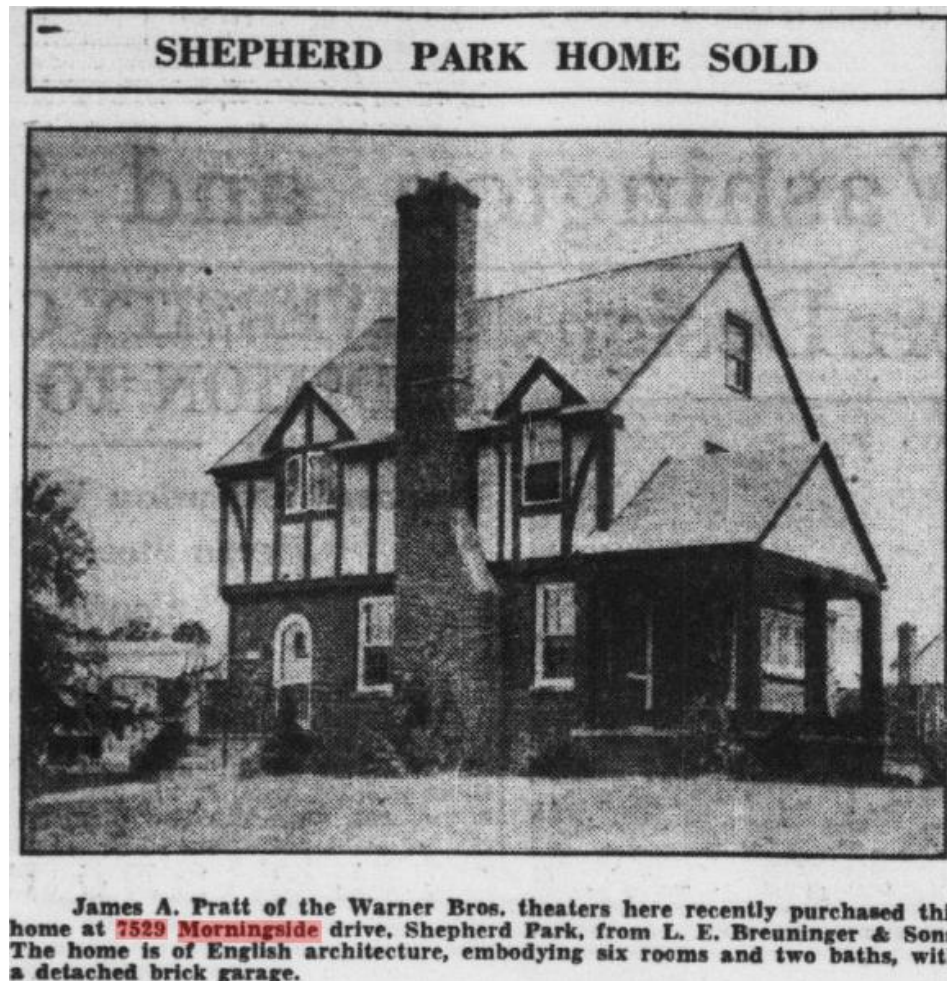
¹ *The Evening Star*, December 14, 1929.

² Made a bit narrower by the shifting of the south lot line to accommodate the construction of 7525 Morningside, necessitating the creation of A&T Lot 801 out of the originally platted Lot 30.

³ *The Evening Star*, December 21, 1929.

⁴ 2,705,278, March 29, 1955, spotlight attachment for movie projector; 2,854,562, September 30, 1958, heat shield for auditorium spotlight; 2,909,652, October 20, 1959, improved portable spotlight projector.

Department of Commerce for a time, and was a White House personnel officer from the end of Hoover's administration to the middle of Eisenhower's. The couple briefly listed their house for sale in 1945—"one of the most attractive brick homes" of three bedrooms, two or three baths, an attic, a two-car garage, and gas heat—but held onto it. A 1958 mortgage suggests they may have undertaken some renovations at the time. Lillian died in 1962, and James finally sold the place in August 1970.⁵



The Evening Star, September 27, 1930

Shepherd Park had been heavily restricted by deed covenants excluding African Americans and Jews. After these had been invalidated by the Supreme Court, the demography of the neighborhood changed rapidly, with many blacks and Jews finally able to invest in family homes there. The new owners of 7529 Morningside were Charles R. and Jacquelyn W. Sadler, an African-American couple. Mr. Sadler graduated Claflin College with a degree in English and embarked on a teaching career, through which he met his wife, Jacquelyn Walton Sadler. A fellowship to a U.S. cultural exchange program in Southeast Asia led Charles Sadler to a new

⁵ *The Evening Star*, June 1, 1945; *The Evening Star*, March 13, 1962; District of Columbia Deed Book 13132, page 400.

career with the U.S. Agency for International Development, a master's degree in international affairs, and postings in Africa. Sadler trained a thousand teachers and organized seminars for civil servants in francophone Africa. Ultimately posted in Washington, he directed public and international programs for the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission. Mrs. Sadler was a graduate of Fisk University with a degree in biology and achieved a master's degree in health education from the University of Pittsburgh, as well as graduate certificates from the New York University and Howard University. She joined her husband in his African postings, playing the vital support role that Foreign Service wives traditionally did. Returning to Washington, she worked on research projects at Howard University and headed the HIV-AIDS program for D.C. Public Schools.

Both the Sadlers passed away in 2008, leaving the Morningside Drive property to their daughter, Zara Ellis Sadler. Dr. Sadler, a Ph.D. in biostatistics from the Medical University of South Carolina, is a director of the Inter-tribal Center for Social Change (ICSC), which she runs partly from the house. Her husband, Dr. Marc Rankin, is an orthopedist and specialist in sports medicine with his own practice and serves as team physician to the University of the District of Columbia and St. John's College High School. He is a co-director of ICSC.

Evaluation of significance

Buildings seldom lack significance; they all have had their own uses and stories. Landmark designation is about recognizing the most important from among the rest. It is an inherently comparative exercise. The original definition of a landmark is a structure or landform that stands out in its landscape, especially from a distance, allowing an observer to establish location relative to it. Of course, the Board performs *historic* designation, meaning that yes, it recognizes properties that stand out for being visually prominent or special, or for being especially good or rare examples of a type or use, but also for possessing and telling an important story.

This report will consider the property against the several District of Columbia designation criteria, which are parallel to the criteria for the National Register of Historic Places.

A. Events

Although it may not be dispositive, a search of Washington newspapers reveals no noteworthy events having taken place at the property, except for the publication of photos of the newly completed house mentioned above.

B. History

Like all the early houses in Shepherd Park, the Sadler house is associated with the suburban development of that neighborhood. Like many others, it can be said to illustrate the desegregation of Shepherd Park. It does not appear to stand out in these stories, in a way that might merit landmark designation, such as being the first home erected (or even the first Tudor), or being the subject of a court fight over a racially restrictive covenant.

C. Individuals

The nomination asserts that the property meets National Register Criterion B for being "associated with the lives of persons significant in our past," including the present owners.

Breuninger & Sons built the house and developed much of the immediate neighborhood. Not as prolific as, say, Harry Wardman, the Breuningers are nonetheless important to the story of this neighborhood. But that significance is dispersed among all the homes they produced. To represent the rest, the designation of *one* of their works would have to be for the best or most important. For comparison, those properties that have been designated for association with Wardman have been recognized as important or unusual buildings in themselves, such as the Wardman Park Hotel tower annex; the block of flats at R and 4th Streets and Florida Avenue NW; or the row of three large apartment buildings on the 1300 block of Clifton Street NW. Henry Breuninger produced many house designs for the family firm, but little outside it. A larger comparative survey would be necessary to determine the most important of his, or his family's, works, but we can begin by looking at those in the immediate vicinity of the subject property (see D. Architecture and Urbanism, below). Properties important for their architecture are typically recognized principally under the architecture-urbanism/artistry/creative masters criteria, because the importance of architects and their works are so closely bound together.

The significance of James A. Pratt's contributions to the motion picture industry or to the development of projectors is unclear. Without additional evidence, we cannot be sure, for instance, how important were his patents. Many patents proved of little use or popularity.

The Sadlers were obviously an accomplished couple, but they do not seem to have reached an importance that would merit the designation of their home. Certainly, African-American Foreign Service officers were still a rarity in the 1970s, and Charles Sadler had much to do with AID's diversity programs. The District's landmark for association with an African-American diplomat is the home of Ralph Bunche, a Nobel Prize winner for mediation in Israel. This is by no means to suggest that this area of history has been exhausted. But Washington has been home to many diplomats, and there are many other African Americans who have a claim to significance in the field (see, for instance, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_Americans_in_foreign_policy and <https://www.blackpast.org/special-features/african-american-u-s-ambassadors-1869/>)

It is too early to consider the historic significance of the present occupants of the home, as their careers are ongoing, and insufficient time has passed to evaluate them in a historic context.

D. Architecture and Urbanism

Does the property “embody the distinguishing characteristics of architectural styles, building types, or methods of construction, or... [present] expressions of landscape architecture, engineering, or urban planning, siting, or design significant to the appearance and development of the District of Columbia or the nation”? With its asymmetry, front chimney, and stucco framed by false half-timbering, 7529 Morningside Drive is an example of the Tudor Revival or English Cottage style. As most houses are an example of *some* style, however, that alone is not a sufficient standard for designation. An architectural landmark must stand out, as one of the best of a class, at least one of the most representative examples, or perhaps a rarity—an unusual example or a scarce building type, use or style.

Washington has whole neighborhoods of Tudor-style houses, including the rows of Foxhall Village and of English Village in Woodley Park. It has veritable Tudor and “Jacobethan” mansions on 16th Street and in Forest Hills.

A comparison of 7529 Morningside to its immediate neighbors is worthwhile to demonstrate whether the property is a landmark Tudor house. For this purpose, the table below contains the following data of all the houses situated on the same square as the Sadler house: dates of construction (based on building permit dates and assuming a construction duration of at least three months); the builder; the architect; and the architectural styles.

Address	Date	Builder	Architect	Style
7511 Morningside	1936-37	Everett A.R. Searl	Evan J. Conner	Tudor (brick and stone)
7515 Morningside	1932-33	Breuninger & Sons	Harvey P. Baxter	Colonial Revival (frame Tidewater type)
7521 Morningside	1931	Breuninger & Sons	H.L. Breuninger	Tudor (brick and frame)
7525 Morningside	1928	Breuninger & Sons	H.L. Breuninger	Colonial Revival (brick and frame garrison type)
7529 Morningside	1929-30	Breuninger & Sons	H.L. Breuninger	Tudor (brick and frame, stuccoed)
7533 Morningside	1930	Breuninger & Sons	H.L. Breuninger	Colonial Revival (brick, gambrel-roofed)
1305 Hemlock	1927-28	Breuninger & Sons	H.L. Breuninger	Colonial Revival (brick and frame garrison type)
1300 Iris	1932	Wagner, Inc.	Roy L. Cobb	Colonial Revival (brick with central pedimented door)
1312 Iris	1928-29	Breuninger & Sons	H.L. Breuninger	Tudor (brick and frame, stuccoed)
1316 Iris	1928-29	Breuninger & Sons	H.L. Breuninger	Tudor (brick and frame, stuccoed)
7530 13 th	1926	F.K. Mohler	H.L. Breuninger	Tudor (brick and frame, stuccoed)
7534 13 th	1926	F.K. Mohler	H.L. Breuninger	Tudor? (brick and frame, altered upper story?)
7538 13 th	1926	F.K. Mohler	C.M. Woodward	Colonial Revival (brick and frame, gambrel-roofed)
7542 13 th	1926	F.K. Mohler	C.M. Woodward	Colonial Revival (frame, gambrel-roofed)

All the houses were erected between 1926 and 1937, and most by Breuninger and Sons to a design by Henry L. Breuninger. Most predate the Sadler house.

The numbers of Tudors and Colonials are about even. There is no need to examine the entire neighborhood, let alone the rest of the city, to find Tudor houses that compete with the visual qualities of the Sadler house. Consider 7511 Morningside and 1316 Iris Street, pictured on the next page. These contemporaries are not inferior in composition, materials or general appearance, nor are they less imposing. This is not to suggest that all ought to be landmarks. Rather, they are all handsome homes, part and parcel of an attractive, eclectic neighborhood of quality, middle-class residential architecture. This suggests, in turn, that consideration of designation in Shepherd Park should focus on the neighborhood as a whole, rather than singling out individual homes that do not distinguish themselves from the rest.



E. Artistry

The property is a handsome house within a handsome neighborhood. It is the product of developers who took the trouble to individualize the designs of their residential products. As suggested above, as one of many middle-class Tudor-style houses of its period, the Sadler house cannot be said to exhibit “high artistic or aesthetic values that contribute significantly to the heritage and appearance of the District of Columbia or the nation.” It is part and parcel of a neighborhood of houses of similar size, quality and styles.

F. Creative Masters

Architect Henry L. Breuninger did a lot of design work for his firm, on detached houses, a few semidetached, some rows, and perhaps even a church. He did try to individualize the designs of Breuninger and Sons’ residential products. He was obviously quite competent, a master in the medieval craft sense of having learned and applied the “art and mystery” of architecture. But the styles he employed in Shepherd Park—principally Tudor and Colonial—were already popular nationwide, and can be seen at District of Columbia mansions, apartments and rows, as well as at middle-class single-family dwellings. Most of Breuninger’s homes do not stand out relative to their peers; he was not particularly innovative or influential.

G. Archaeology

The nomination contains an archaeology section, but it offers no information on the subject aside from brief background on the area’s landforms, vegetation and prehistoric inhabitants. The nomination nonetheless claims that the property “has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.” At the confluence of two rivers, the District of Columbia contains many prehistoric resources. The suburban areas also bear traces of the agricultural past since European and African settlement. However, most parcels have not been tested for the presence of archaeological features. This is true of this lot and, while there is always the possibility of unearthing artifacts, there is no reason to believe that this property is more likely to conceal archaeological features than are its neighbors.