
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 14-16

Van View

7714 13th Street, NW

Parcel 91, Lot 142

Meeting Date: October 30, 2014
Applicant: Charisse Brossard, owner
Affected ANC: ANC 4A
Staff Reviewer: Kim Williams

After careful consideration, the Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the detached dwelling known as Van View located at 7714 13th Street NW to the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites. It is further recommended that the landmark nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places for listing at the local level of significance.



Architecture and History

The stately Second Empire-style country house at 7714 13th Street known as Van View is located in the Shepherd Park neighborhood in northwest D.C. It is a large three-story frame structure covered with a steep mansard roof. A one-story, non-contributing garage is located at the rear of the house, while the north side yard offers mature shade trees that appear to be quite old. The property was named for its original owners, John and Mary Van Riswick who built the house between 1868 and 1871. The Van Riswicks lived in the city, but had family ties to Washington County dating back to before the establishment of the District of Columbia, and operated the property as a working farm and the house as a country retreat.

Once part of a larger tract of land, the house occupies a still-gracious half-acre corner lot at 13th and Jonquil Streets, and is generally surrounded by smaller, mid-20th-century Colonial and Tudor Revival-style detached dwellings that define the neighborhood today. Van View's date of construction, its position on the lot (slightly askew to 13th Street), and its architecture clearly identify it as a country house that pre-dates the mid-20th-century suburbanization of Shepherd Park.

Rural Washington County (all of that area beyond the original city limits) was sparsely populated throughout the 19th and into well the 20th century; however, small and medium-sized farms and their farmhouses were ubiquitous on the landscape. These farmhouses were occupied by both the small landholder who farmed the land and by wealthy Washingtonians who built second homes in the countryside. While some of these farmhouses and country estates endured as the city expanded, most were demolished by the mid-20th century as the former farmland was developed with houses forming the city's growing residential suburbs. Van View is one of those to have escaped demolition.

John Van Riswick (1815-1886) was a well-to-do businessman in Washington, D.C., serving as president of the Mutual Fire Insurance Company and vice president of the Citizens' National Bank. He and Mary Van Riswick (née Fenwick) lived downtown at 1413 K Street NW where they raised their family; between 1868 and 1871, they built their country house on a 18 ¼-acre parcel of land purchased by them from the estate of Mary's father, Philip Fenwick, following his death in 1868. Before the Civil War, Philip Fenwick was a farmer and slave owner with a sizeable 145-acre farm at the northwest corner of the District boundaries, bordering Rock Creek Park and extending east to present-day 13th Street NW. The Fenwick Farm springhouse associated with Philip Fenwick's farm survives today near Kalmia Road and 17th Street, on the campus of present-day Lowell School.

Following the death of John and Mary Van Riswick in 1886 and 1896, respectively, the Van View property was inherited by their grandson, Wilton Lambert, who in 1909 sold the property to a developer. In addition to the 18-acre Van View, the developer purchased the adjoining 97-acre Clagett farm, and the more than 100-acre country home of Alexander "Boss" Shepherd, known as "Bleak House." These three properties were ultimately subdivided into the Sixteenth Street Heights and Shepherd Park neighborhoods and built upon with detached, mid-20th-century revival-style dwellings. Like most of the County's rural dwellings, Shepherd's "Bleak House" and the Clagett Farmhouse were demolished in the process, while Van View remained standing on its corner lot carved out around it. A stable/garage building once associated with "Bleak House" also escaped demolition and can be found a few blocks south of Van View.

Evaluation

The Van View property meets DC Designation Criteria A (Events), B (History) and National Register Criterion A as a country estate and farm that is directly associated with the city's agrarian past and its suburbanization in the early to mid-20th century. Van View also meets DC Designation Criteria D (Architecture) and National Register Criterion C, because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a period and type of construction—that is, a country estate whose Second Empire style distinguished it from the vernacular farmhouses of the County, and established it as an avant-garde country house that was home to a wealthy Washingtonian.

The Period of Significance is from 1868-1871, being the range of dates when the house was known to have been constructed.