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**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD**  
Historic Landmark Case No. 15-25

**The Jost-Kuhn House**  
1354 Madison Street NW  
Square 2799, Lots 19 and 809

Meeting Date: January 28, 2016  
Applicant: Mr. Johnny Bowen, Owner  
Affected ANC: 4A  
Staff Reviewer: Kim Williams

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The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the Jost-Kuhn House, 1354 Madison Street NW, a historic landmark in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites, and requests that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places.

The Jost-Kuhn house meets National Register Criteria A and C for its associations with the suburbanization of the once-rural Washington County, District of Columbia and as an excellent example of an Italianate country villa.

**Historical and Architectural Background**

The two-story red brick house located at 1354 Madison Street, known as the Jost-Kuhn House for its original and subsequent owners, was constructed in 1859 on a 24-acre tract of land in Brightwood. The almost-cube-like dwelling is designed in an Italian villa style, is covered with a low hipped roof with a central cupola, paired end chimneys and an overhanging bracketed wood cornice. A double-story wood porch with scroll-sawn detailing and a single-story wood porch are located on the northeast and northwest elevations of the house, both facing Madison Street

The house, sited at a skewed angle to the street occupies a much-reduced 8,379 square-foot lot of land (approximately .2 acres) from its original 24-acre tract and is now surrounded by early 20<sup>th</sup>-century detached, single-family dwellings. The Jost-Kuhn house is the only one of several historically adjacent rural properties to have survived demolition as part of the residential development in the area, making the house an important survivor of the pre-Civil War cultural landscape.

Before the Civil War, Brightwood residents were generally farmers with small to large holdings, and entrepreneurs in businesses related to farming and milling. But the War took its toll on the agricultural land, and after the War, most of the owners sold off their property, opening the area up for “gentlemen farming,” weekendening, summering, and related leisure. A horse race track—the Brightwood Driving Park—with betting, a resort hotel, and annual medieval tournaments were among the attractions that made the community a destination. Washingtonians with the financial means began to purchase former farmland on which to build large country houses. Benedict Jost, a Swiss immigrant and successful merchant in downtown DC was a few years ahead of this trend: just before the outbreak of the Civil War, Jost purchased the 24-acre tract of land and built his country villa on land immediately north of the race course. Jost had come to the city about 10 years earlier and operated a wholesale liquor store on Pennsylvania Avenue.

After its construction, Jost placed advertisements for this country house in various newspapers, describing it as having a “back building” for servants and well adapted as a residence for a “fashionable family.” Although Jost appears to have built the house for rental use and income, he and his family eventually moved to the country, where his wife continued to live following his death. In 1882, Gustav Kuhn, a German immigrant purchased the property. After moving into the house with his family, Kuhn began to cultivate his farm property, while at the same time running his piano dealership downtown, making him an early suburban commuter.

After living on the farm for more than 25 years, the Kuhns recognized the value of their land for residential development and sold it to Holmes Central Realty for \$100,000. Just two months later, in September 1909, Holmes Realty filed a subdivision plat for the property consistent with the Permanent Highway Plan that included the east-west Longfellow, Madison, Montague Streets and a sliver of Nicholson Street, the north-south 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Streets, and Colorado Avenue. The Holmes real estate company and other real estate developers would soon purchase adjacent lands with farmhouses and associated buildings on them, but only the Jost-Kuhn house would survive its suburban development in this vicinity. In 1919, Holmes Realty repaired the house on its site and sold it to an individual buyer. The property has had a succession of owners over the decades and is now owned by Mr. Johnny Bowen, the sponsor of this landmark application.

### **Evaluation**

The Jost-Kuhn house meets D.C. Designation Criteria A and B (Events and History) and National Register Criterion A for its associations with the suburbanization of the once-rural Washington County, District of Columbia. The house is significant as a mid-19th century country villa built before the Civil War that survived the early to mid-20th century residential development of the former Washington County. The house is a rare survivor of the pre-Civil War landscape of rural Washington, D.C.

The Jost-Kuhn House meets D.C. Designation Criteria D and F (architecture and urbanism and artistry) and National Register Criterion C as an excellent example of an Italianate country villa. The house retains distinguishing features of its style and form, including its cube-like form, its hipped roof and central cupola, its Italianate-style door and window trim and details, and its bold, wood bracketed cornice. Although there are many Italianate-style houses within the original city limits and Georgetown, the Jost-Kuhn House is the only Italianate-style country villa that survives on land outside of the original city limits.

The Period of Significance extends from 1859 when the house is known to have been erected until 1919 when the house was renovated and sold by the real estate company to an individual buyer. The house retains high integrity. The house retains its distinctive form, despite a two-story frame addition on the northwest elevation, and retains its original hipped roof with hipped roof cupola, its Italianate detailing, and a high percentage of its original materials. The existing porches were built using material salvaged from the original front porch.