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## HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 15-19

### **Kalorama Park and Archaeological Site**

1875 Columbia Road, NW  
Square 2550, Lot 0818

Meeting Date: November 19, 2015  
Applicant: Kalorama Citizens Association  
Affected ANC: 1C  
Staff Reviewer: Kim Williams

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The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board approve the Nomination to Amend the Kalorama Park Archaeological Site to include additional historic context and an expanded Period of Significance. HPO recommends that the Board forward the amended nomination to the National Register as the Kalorama Park and Archaeological Site under Criterion A with a Period of Significance of 1942-1949, and under Criterion D with a Period of Significance of 1836-1937.

#### *Preservation Background*

In 2010, the Historic Preservation Review Board designated the Kalorama Park Archeological Site 51NW061 to the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites under D.C. Designation Criterion A (history) for its associations with the institution of slavery, and under Criterion G (archaeology) for enhancing our understanding of enslaved individuals through material remains. This designation was based upon archeological investigations at Kalorama Park that were undertaken in 1984 and in 2008. The investigations revealed structural remains of the plantation house built by John Little that stood on the site from 1836 until 1937, remains of an associated stable, and artifacts related to the Little family, their slaves and servants and activities that took place there. The archaeological record has provided and continues to have the potential to provide information about the ante-bellum cultural landscape and the enslaved inhabitants of the John Little plantation. As currently listed in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites in 2010, the Period of Significance for the Kalorama Park Archaeological Site extends from 1836 until 1903, coinciding with the Little family tenure on the site.

Kalorama Park is also within the boundaries of the Kalorama Triangle Historic District, listed in the National Register in 1987 with a Period of Significance of 1893-1931. However, because the establishment of the park (1942), its design (1947) and construction of the shelter house (1949) post-date the Period of Significance for the historic district, the park and the shelter house have been considered non-contributing resources within the historic district.

During the Spring of 2015, the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) developed plans for Kalorama Park to address soil erosion control and new playground equipment. HPO and HPRB reviewed the project for its impact on the below-ground archaeological site. At the time of the hearing, the Kalorama Citizens Association (KCA) presented new research and information on the history of the park in an effort to illustrate the significance of the park beyond its archaeological significance. With encouragement from HPRB, and in an effort to officially recognize the full history of the site, KCA has since prepared this nomination. The

nomination—an amendment to the Kalorama Park Archaeological Site Landmark designation—narrates a more complete history of the site in its evolution from 19<sup>th</sup>-century plantation to suburban neighborhood and 20<sup>th</sup>-century park. To that end, the nomination provides an expanded context and Period of Significance for Kalorama Park. If approved, the John Little Archaeological Site and Kalorama Park nomination will be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places.

### *Site History and Description*

Kalorama Park, a triangular park on the west side of Columbia Road between 19<sup>th</sup> Street and Mintwood Place, is an approximately three-acre park that occupies the former domestic complex of a 56.5-acre plantation, owned and operated by John Little during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The full acreage was located north of today's Florida Avenue, east of present-day 19<sup>th</sup> Street, and to either side of Columbia Road. Before John Little purchased the property in 1836, the land had been part of the more extensive 18<sup>th</sup>-century tract known as "Pleasant Plains." In 1817, William Thornton, architect, city Commissioner, Superintendent of Patents, and inventor bought two parcels of Pleasant Plains forming the 56.5-acre tract that would later become John Little's farm. On this land, Thornton established a successful and popular racetrack near present-day 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Park Road, for the Washington Jockey Club that attracted thousands of city residents to the country and inspired the establishment of a nearby inn for overnight guests. Upon Thornton's death, Christian and Matthew Hines purchased the land with the intention of establishing a silkworm operation. The Hines began planting mulberry trees on the property and built a dwelling across Columbia Road from today's Kalorama Park, but the venture proved unsuccessful and the Hines sold the property in 1836 to John Little.

John Little, a Washington-born butcher, bought the 56.5 acres to farm and raise cattle. He immediately built his dwelling house on one of the highest points of his land—the future site of Kalorama Park—and began purchasing slaves to provide the labor for his farming operations. John Little's farm was clearly successful; by 1851 he had built a stylish new three-story, Italianate-style frame dwelling—known through photographs—on the site of the earlier 1836 house. According to the 1860 U.S. Census, Little owned 13 slaves, some of whom were born on his plantation and one of whom—Hortense Prout—made her mark in history in a "daring bid for freedom" at the start of the Civil War, as detailed in the nomination. In April 1862, ten months after her escape, President Lincoln abolished slavery in the District, making Hortense Prout one of the last known enslaved Washingtonians to attempt to escape slavery.

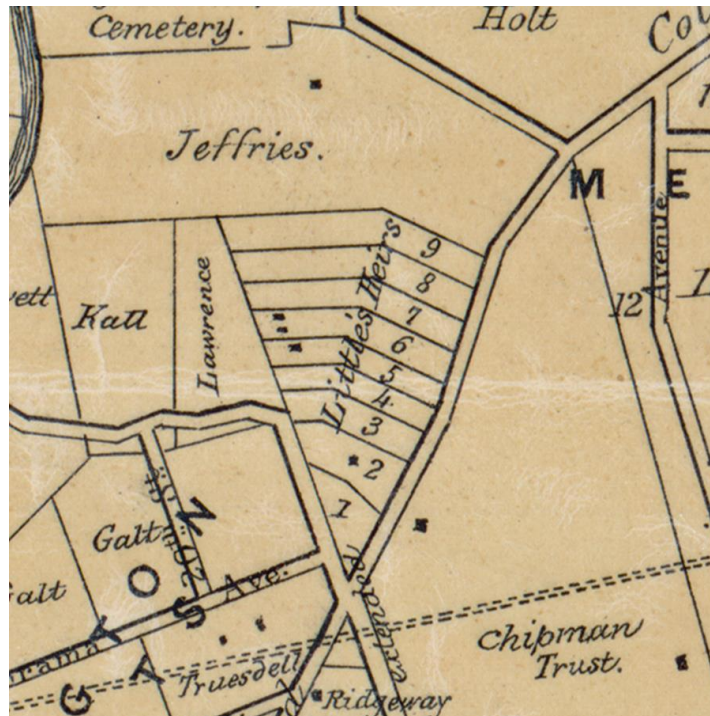
Following the end of the Civil War, John Little continued to live on the property with his family, and to farm his land with the help of hired farmhands. Upon his death in 1876, a 38.5-acre portion of his land east of Columbia Road went into Equity, while 11.62 acres surrounding the domestic complex was inherited by his five daughters. As a result of the Equity Case, the 38.5 acres was ultimately platted in 1888 as the "Commissioners' Subdivision of Washington Heights," forming a large portion of the Washington Heights Historic District today.<sup>1</sup>

In 1880, the five Little daughters subdivided their inherited land west of Columbia Road into nine sizeable lots (Lots 1-9). Of the nine lots, Lots 5 through 9 would be subdivided for residential development, while Lots 1-4 would remain undeveloped, ultimately becoming Kalorama Park.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Together, the 38.5 acres and the 11.62 acres total 50.12 acres, leaving a remainder of 6.38 acres of the original 56.5 acre parcel. It is not clear from the record what became of these remaining 6.38 acres.

<sup>2</sup> An eastern swath of Lots 2-4 was taken by the government for the widening of Columbia Road, while the southern part of Lot 1 was similarly taken for the cutting through of Kalorama Road. The total acreage of Lots 1-4 was 3.61. The total acreage of Kalorama Park is approximately 3.18 acres.



The Little manor house stood on Lot 2 (in 1883, this house lot was re-subdivided into two lots such that the lot line was drawn down the middle of the house, later turning the large dwelling into a duplex). Four of the five Little sisters and their families lived in the manor house until the turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup> century. The fifth sister, Margaret Little Sands and her developer husband, Lawrence Sands built their own house on an adjacent lot, while planning the residential subdivision of Lots 5-9. The residential subdivision of those lots corresponds today with the northern boundary of Kalorama Park to the south side of Biltmore Street, including Mintwood Place. (The distinctive crook in Mintwood Place follows the configuration of the original lot lines of the Little sisters' subdivision of their inherited land. In contrast, when Biltmore Street, then Baltimore Street, was platted, it was straightened, removing the crook of the historic lot line.)

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, following the deaths of four of the Little sisters, the northern part of the former manor house was sold to lumber dealer Thomas W. Smith and the southern half to brewer, Christian Heurich. While the Smith family occupied their half of the duplex, Heurich never lived in his, but appears to have rented it out while planning for development on the site which never materialized. During the Smith and Heurich period of ownership, a 16.5-foot swath along the eastern edge of the property was taken for the widening of Columbia Road, just as a sizeable section of Lot 1 was taken for construction of Kalorama Road. Still, the house remained on the site, and was occupied until at least 1925 when widower Caroline Smith died. In 1937, the house was razed and plans were set in motion to retain the surviving acreage as a neighborhood park.

In 1931, NCPPC had identified the "Heurich-Smith" tract for "park purposes," and the Kalorama Citizens Association strongly favored the site for recreational purposes. However, the acquisition took more than a decade, finally coming to fruition in May 1942, when NCPC bought 2.07 acres of land from the Smith Estate, and in 1946, when it bought the adjacent 1.07 acres that was then owned by Bliss Properties. In 1947, upon completion of its purchase, the Planning Division of the National Capital Parks prepared a plan for the site's development, a plan that was

largely implemented in 1948 with construction of a lawn and plaza areas, playground equipment, basketball courts and walkways. The plan was completed in 1949 with construction of the shelter house. Established during a time of segregation, Kalorama Park was opened as, and remained a whites-only playground until 1954 despite an increasing percentage of African American residents in the neighborhood during the 1940s and early 1950s.

### *Evaluation*

The proposed amendment states that Kalorama Park meets D.C. Designation Criteria A (Events), B (History); C (Individuals); D (Urbanism); and G (Archaeology). The nomination holds that the property also meets National Register Criteria A, B, C, and D.

Staff concurs that the property meets D.C. Designation Criteria A, B and G, but does not concur that the property meets D.C. Designation Criteria C or D. Staff finds that the property meets National Register Criteria A and D.

**D.C. Designation Criteria A and B (Events and History)/National Register Criterion A:** The property is associated with events that contributed to the culture and development of the District of Columbia; and is associated with historical periods, patterns of growth and change that contributed to the development of the District of Columbia. In particular, the 3.18-acre Kalorama Park is the site of the domestic complex of the larger 56.5-acre slave-holding estate of John Little providing important history related to the ante-bellum cultural landscape and history of slavery in the city. Although the manor house and its associated outbuildings are no longer extant above ground, the preservation of open space on the site of the farm's domestic complex helps in the visualization of that cultural landscape.

In addition, the site is associated with the transformation of Washington County from a rural area to a residential one. During the 1880s, technological achievements (establishment of the electric streetcar) made the outskirts of the city, including the Little Farm, viable for development, at the same time that the city's growing population intensified the need for housing beyond the original city limits. The subdivision of the former Little property into "the Commissioners' Subdivision of Washington Heights" and "Mintwood Subdivision" into urban-sized rowhouse lots, illustrates the nature of this residential development to accommodate a growing middle class. Because the Little House and its immediately surrounding land continued to be owned by the Little family until 1903, and occupied as a duplex residence until ca. 1925, it managed to escape the subdivision process to a point in time when open space was highly valuable and sought after for neighborhood recreational purposes.

In 1924, Congress passed legislation to create NCPC to systematically identify and acquire open land for the development of parks in D.C. In 1931, before the demolition of the Little House, NCPC identified the Little domestic complex as a site for park purposes. Although it did not immediately purchase the site, it did so in 1942, at a time when Congress and city officials realized that wartime pressures and an increase in population necessitated more and better recreational facilities. In that year, the D.C. Board of Recreation was established, and a plan adopted to guide NCPC in establishing recreation centers and neighborhood playgrounds in the city. Kalorama Park was thus acquired as part of that plan, largely implemented between 1942 and 1945. Like other city playgrounds of the period, Kalorama Park reflected the era's focus on outdoor recreation and education. In addition to offering play equipment, sports courts, walkways, and open spaces for outdoor activity, the city's playgrounds also included field houses or shelter houses, like that at Kalorama Park, for offices, restrooms and spaces for classes.

In accordance with Department of Recreation policy at the time, Kalorama Park was opened as a whites-only park and would remain whites-only one until de-segregation in 1954, despite challenges from the community to desegregate the park before then. However, because Kalorama Park did not play a notable role in the history of desegregation of the city's parks, this aspect of the park's history should not be considered a reason for its eligibility under National Register Criterion A as argued in the nomination.

**D.C. Designation Criterion C (Individuals)/National Register Criterion B:** The nomination contends that Kalorama Park is associated with the lives of persons significant to the history of the District of Columbia. The nomination identifies most of the primary owners of the 56.5-acre property through time and based upon their biographies establishes that the property is eligible under D.C. Criterion C/National Register Criterion B. Staff does not support this finding. The *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria* states that properties eligible under Criterion B should be associated with the productive life of the person determined to be significant in history, reflecting the time period when he/she achieved significance. The *Guidelines* further state that properties associated with an important individual should be compared to other associated properties to identify those that best represent the person's historic contributions.

Of the seven persons identified in the nomination, only three of them--William Thornton, Christian Heurich, and Christian Hines—would be automatically considered significant persons. Both Thornton and Heurich are already associated with properties in D.C. that more appropriately exemplify their productive lives: the Octagon House and U.S. Capitol for architect William Thornton; and the Heurich mansion for the wealthy brewer, Christian Heurich. Furthermore, the racetrack that Thornton built was not located on the park site. Hines' contribution in D.C. history is as a well-known memoirist and not as a farmer or agricultural entrepreneur, thus the property and his failed silkworm venture does not well represent Hines' life or career. It has not been shown that this venture actually occurred on the site of Kalorama Park (his house was across Columbia Road from the Park), nor are there any known vestiges of it, either above or below grade. While an argument could be made that Hortense Prout, well-known in local history for her daring escape from the Little Farm during the Civil War, is significant to the history of slavery in D.C., Prout's associations with the property are more appropriately defined, and have been detailed, under NR Criteria A and D of this nomination.

**D.C. Designation Criterion D (Urbanism)/National Register Criterion C:** The nomination argues that the property embodies the distinctive characteristics of two periods of construction: 1) an antebellum manor house grounds; and 2) a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century urban park. Staff does not find the argument for either compelling. The antebellum manor house and its grounds are no longer extant, and the below-grade material remains have already been determined eligible under D.C. Criteria A, B and G/National Register Criteria A and D and listed in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites as an archaeological site. In examining the eligibility of Kalorama Park as a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century urban park under Criterion C, staff turned to *National Register Bulletin 18: How to Evaluate and Nominate Designed Historic Landscapes*. According to these *Guidelines*, a designed historic landscape would meet Criterion C because of its association with the productive careers of significant figures in American landscape architecture; an association with a historical trend or school of theory and practice within landscape architecture; the presence of highly skilled craftsmanship or use of particular materials; or the survival of rare or specimen plant materials associated with a particular period or style of landscape history.

Kalorama Park was designed by the D.C. Department of Recreation according to an established model—one that provided open play area, playground equipment area, sport court (basketball)

area, walkways, and included a shelter house. The park was built as part of the Progressive era's emphasis on recreation and the healthfulness of fresh air and outdoor activity. However, it is not known to have any associations with significant designers, nor is it associated with any historical trend or school of theory or practice in American landscape architecture; nor does it illustrate highly skilled craftsmanship. The nomination describes the shelter house as being a good example of a shelter house built after World War II in the city's parks. The shelter house, constructed in 1949, did follow a model established by the Department of Recreation—that is the L-shaped, hipped-roof type—however, in this case, the shelter house is one of the component parts of the park and does not alone qualify the park for listing under Criterion C. It has also been altered and no longer offers a good representation of its type. In addition, this shelter house type was not identified as “eligible” in the 2014 *District of Columbia Parks and Recreation Master Plan Historic Preservation Review* that included a survey and evaluation of D.C. Department of Recreation fieldhouses.

The nomination makes the argument that the design for Kalorama Park follows the historic character of the Little Plantation; that paths trace the curved driveways that once ran through the grounds, and that its formal entrance court leads to the front door of the manor house. A close reading of historic maps reveals that the paths do not actually align, and the historic entrance would not have been approached on-axis with the front door, but from either side of the curvilinear drive. Undoubtedly the natural topography of the site influenced the design for both the house and the park. The same flat area at the top of the hill made for a quality house site, just as it offered a good opportunity for open play space. Similarly, the farm drives and park paths meander down the hill, following the natural terrain. The raised terrace and the line of play areas and community garden parallel to Columbia Road do not appear to have any direct relationship to the Little House site.

Based upon this assessment, staff does not find Kalorama Park eligible under Criterion C as a designed landscape. However, according to the *Guidelines*, if a designed landscape does not qualify under the above, it may still qualify under National Register Criterion A for its history, or its association with social movements, such as is being recommended for Kalorama Park.

#### **D.C. Designation Criterion G/National Register Criterion D:**

The Kalorama Park Archaeological site is listed in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites and is well recognized for its archaeological importance for having yielded and still having the potential to yield the structural remains of John Little's plantation house, outbuildings and household artifacts. The 2010 nomination and this amendment nomination thoroughly establish the property's significance under National Register Criterion D.

#### *Period of Significance:*

The current Period of Significance for the Kalorama Park Archaeological Site extends from 1836 to 1903, coinciding with the Little family ownership and occupation of the site. This Amendment proposes five Periods of Significance that essentially extend uninterrupted from 1817, when William Thornton purchased the 56.5-acre site that includes the three-acre Kalorama Park, to 1954 when the city's parks were de-segregated.

Staff recommends two Periods of Significance. The first is associated with the Archaeological Site under NR Criteria A and D and would extend from 1836 when John Little purchased the 56.5-acre property until 1937 when the Little House was demolished. The extension of the Period of Significance beyond the Little family ownership of the property would accommodate any material remains of the house between the Little family ownership and demolition of the house in 1937.

The Second Period of Significance is associated with Kalorama Park under NR Criterion A, and would extend from 1942 when NCPD purchased the property as a park and playground until 1949 when the implementation of the park plan was completed with construction of the shelter house.

#### *Resource Count and Integrity*

The Kalorama Park property includes two sites and one building: 1) the John Little archaeological site; 2) Kalorama Park; and 3) the shelter house. This count is based upon National Register *Bulletin 16A: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form* which guides the reader to count a park as a single site and to not count landscape features such as fences and paths separately from the site unless they are particularly important or large in size. The shelter house is being counted as a resource since it is a sizeable building and an integral component of the landscape. Although it does not want a count of individual landscape features, the *NR Guidelines* do suggest identifying the component parts or features of a landscape site and describing them in narrative form. The *Guidelines* also note that the historic integrity of a landscape is largely based upon the presence of such identifiable components. Components may be specific features, but may also include but not necessarily be limited to spatial relationships, topography, property boundaries, site furnishings, circulation systems, and the like. In the case of Kalorama Park, the following component features have been identified:

- Open central lawn on the site of the former manor house and shown in the 1947 park plan
- Shelter house
- Paved plaza between the lawn and the shelter house
- Axial relationship between the open lawn, plaza and shelter house
- Circulation system, namely the gently curving pathways that encircle the central lawn and connect the parts of the park to each other according to the natural topography and as shown on the 1947 park plan
- Entrance court with stone retaining walls on Columbia Road
- 19<sup>th</sup> Street entrance and retaining wall
- Defined spaces aligning Columbia Road, including current Tot lot, playground, and community garden

Together these component features give the park its integrity. Not all of these features are necessarily required in their current or historic form in order that the park's integrity be maintained. However, the park may lose its integrity if changes to one or more than one of the component features are significant or substantial enough to compromise the character of the park. Therefore, in the case of future alterations to the park, consideration should be given to the identified component features and how any changes to those features may affect the park's overall integrity.

#### *Contributing/Non-Contributing Resources*

According to the National Register, a contributing resource is one that was present during the period of significance, relates to the documented significance of the property, and possesses historic integrity, or is capable of yielding important information about the period. A non-contributing resource is one that was either not present during the period of significance, or, due to alterations, disturbances, additions, or other changes, no longer possesses historic integrity. Based upon these definitions, the John Little Archaeological site and Kalorama Park, are contributing resources, while the shelter house is a non-contributing one. The shelter house was present during the period of significance and relates to the documented significance of the property, but it has been substantially altered and no longer represents a good example of its

type. The open porch and L-shaped footprint are no longer intact and windows and doors have been altered. Although the shelter house is non-contributing due to its integrity, it is still a component element of the park and its location, scale and relationship to the other component features are critical to maintaining the integrity of the park.

*Recommendation*

Staff recommends that the Kalorama Park Archaeological Site nomination be amended with its additional historic context to become The Kalorama Park and Archaeological Site under DC Designation Criteria A, B, and G. Staff further recommends that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register under NR Criterion A with a Period of Significance of 1942-1949 and under NR Criterion D with a Period of Significance of 1836-1937.