
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case Nos. 17-14 and 17-21

St. Paul's College

3015/3025 4th Street NE

Square 3648, Lots 1068 and 1069 *or*
Square 3648, Lots 1067, 1068 and 1069

Meeting Date: November 16, 2017

Applicants: St. Paul on Fourth Street, Inc.; D.C. Preservation League

Affected ANC: 5E

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate St. Paul's College, 3015/3025 4th Street NE, a historic landmark in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites, and requests that a nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places for listing as of local significance.

St. Paul's College, located at 3015-3025 4th Street NE in the Brookland neighborhood, is an approximately ten-acre remnant of a larger college campus established by the Missionary Society of Saint Paul the Apostle (the Paulists) for its seminary, dedicated to the education of priests to perform the evangelical work of the Roman Catholic order in North America. The property consists of a single building, initially constructed in 1914, but expanded in a series of wings added over the course of building campaigns in 1935, 1941, 1956, and 1957. The 1914 building, designed by the firm of Murphy and Olmsted, is a three-story stone structure, and is executed in an academic expression of the Gothic Revival style that includes an off-center entrance tower with Tudor Gothic detailing and an apsidal bay at the end of the east wing. The later additions, built to accommodate a convent, new residential quarters for the priests, a library, and a new chapel, all respected the stone building materials and collegiate Gothic style of the original building, making for a stylistically sympathetic composition, accommodating the increasing educational, religious, and residential needs of the seminarians.

The building is located on a rise that was described at the time of its purchase as "thickly wooded to the north and open to the south with a sweeping view of the city." The college building, like the farmhouse that stood there before it, was oriented southwesterly with a view to the city. Over the course of its ownership, St. Paul's has reduced its original acreage. A parcel to the east was sold in 1932 to the Redemptorists who built Holy Redeemer College on that site. The U.S. Catholic Bishops erected a building to the north in the 1980s. And approximately ten acres to the north, east and south of the college were developed with townhouses in 2007. While these developments eliminated much of the open space that defined the historic campus, the college complex retains a gracious lawn and wooded copse of mature shade trees to its west. This open and wooded area separates the building from 4th Street NE and provides a visual historic context. A path marked by stone piers leads from the sidewalk along 4th Street through the wooded grove to the college building, while a vehicular drive further south on 4th Street leads past a single stone pier to a circular drive in front of the original 1914 building (the other pier is in pieces on

the ground next to the entrance). The property today consists of three lots with the college building occupying one lot, the circular drive another, and the open space with the lawn, trees, path and vehicular drive, the third.

Two separate landmark nominations have been filed for St. Paul's College. Staff recommends that the historical information in the two nominations be combined into a single one and that the revised nomination be forwarded to the National Register. The two proposed different boundaries, however, a matter that is discussed below.

History and architecture

The Missionary Society of Saint Paul the Apostles was founded in 1858 with the purpose of converting non-Catholic Americans to Catholicism. To this end, the Paulists established their own educational curriculum to ordain priests at Saint Paul the Apostle Church in New York. Upon the establishment of the Catholic University of America, the Paulists transferred their seminary to Washington, building Saint Thomas Aquinas College on the university grounds. In 1911, with a desire for independence from the university and a need for more space, the Paulists purchased 25 acres near the school, known as the Stewart property for its nineteenth-century owner. The new Saint Thomas Aquinas College opened in 1914. It was formally dedicated in 1916, at which time it was renamed St. Paul's College. Students lived, studied and worshipped in the building according to a rigorous discipline.

This original building was designed by the firm of Murphy and Olmsted, and was one of the architecture firm's first major commissions. Both landmark nominations provide biographical information on Frederick V. Murphy and Walter B. Olmsted and establish the firm as a notable one, primarily for its work associated with the Catholic Church and associated institutions, including numerous buildings on the campuses of the Catholic University and Georgetown University. Although less is known about Walter Olmsted, Frederick Murphy had a strong presence in the District of Columbia's architecture circles beyond the practice of his firm. He came to D.C. in 1899 to work as a draftsman in the Office of the Supervising Architect in the Treasury Department, took evening classes at Columbian College, and pursued studies at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris 1906-1908, ultimately becoming a recipient of a coveted diploma in 1923. In 1907-1908, Murphy worked for the renowned firm of Carrère and Hastings in New York. In 1909, he returned to D.C., where he soon accepted the position of professor and chair of the Department of Architecture at Catholic University. Under his leadership, the department grew in size and stature, with students and the department winning numerous awards over the years. At the same time, Murphy established his private partnership with Olmsted which he remained active in until the latter's death in 1936. In the civic realm, Murphy worked with the Allied Architects, Inc. on the design of federal buildings, and later served on the Commission of Fine Arts. After Olmsted's death, he struck up a new partnership with a former student, Thomas Locraft.

In addition to Murphy's and Olmsted's work at Catholic, where they designed at least eight educational buildings, dormitories, the gym and the library, the firm produced many other churches, convents, and government, commercial and residential buildings in Washington and beyond. Murphy was well-versed stylistically, reflected in his designs for other Gothic Revival churches, such as the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Georgetown; the Byzantine-inspired Sacred Heart Church designed in collaboration with John J. Earley; the Renaissance-inspired Mullen Library at Catholic; the Romanesque Saint Anthony's Church in Brookland; the

Classical Revival Cannon Office Building; the classical Trew Motor Company showroom on 14th Street (Studio Theater); and several Mediterranean Revival/Craftsman dwellings, including his own home on Quincy Street NE.

As St. Paul's work expanded during the next decades, so too did the college building. In several phases of construction, beginning in the 1930s, the school added wings, extending the main block and adding perpendicular rear wings, forming the building footprint that exists today. These wings accommodated a convent, additional residential quarters, a new chapel, and a dining area. All were designed by different architects who were deferential to the original Murphy and Olmsted building.

Evaluation

St. Paul's College meets D.C. Designation Criteria B (History), D (Architecture and Urbanism), and F (Work of a Master), and the similar National Register Criteria A and C. Under Criterion B, St. Paul's College is significant for its role in the education of priests, in specific, the education of priests to perform evangelical work in North America. The college tells an important part of the story of the development of a constellation of Catholic institutions covering much of Washington's suburban northeast quadrant, catalyzed by the establishment of the Catholic University of America, but comprised of various and independent orders and institutions.

Under Criterion D and F, St. Paul's College is significant as an excellent example of twentieth-century Collegiate Gothic architecture appropriate to its function, and of the early work of the architecture firm of Murphy and Olmsted. The building manifests high quality craftsmanship particularly in its carved stone ornamentation and Tudor Gothic detailing. The additions to the original building are sympathetic, continuing the use of stone and of Gothic Revival details. The original building and its wings set upon the hill create a distinctive campus entity.

Boundaries

The Board has received two nominations for the property—one from St. Paul on Fourth Street, Inc. and one from the D.C. Preservation League. Both nominations have their strengths—the first nomination is stronger on the institutional history and the history of the building's construction, while DCPL's provides more land-use and pre-St. Paul's history of the area, as well as a broader context on the development of Catholic institutions in Brookland. Both nominations conclude that the property meets D.C. Designation Criteria B, D and F for the reasons stated above, and both maintain that the property has integrity. However, the two nominations differ in their determinations of boundaries.

As noted above, the site is a remnant of its historic property and currently consists of three lots in Square 3648: 1067, 1068 and 1069. St. Paul's proposes that its Lots 1068 and 1069 constitute the extent of the landmark. These lots contain the building itself and the upper end of the entry drive, a historic feature of the property, with the lawn and trees immediately around it.

The DCPL nomination proposes to include the above two lots, as well as Lot 1067. Lot 1067, devoid of buildings, contains a broad expanse of lawn and the remnant of a woods that predates the college's tenure. This open space is part of the historic setting of the campus, and recalls the rural history of the site. When purchased by the Paulists, the site was a 25-acre estate that had been carved out of the larger nineteenth-century Metropolis View (later Edgewood) farm. At the

time of purchase, the property had been platted with suburban streets as part of the Permanent Highway Plan. Replacing the dwelling house with the college, the Paulists retained the expansive grounds and its rural character. In later years, the campus has been carved up, as described above, reducing its extent, but also its campus character.

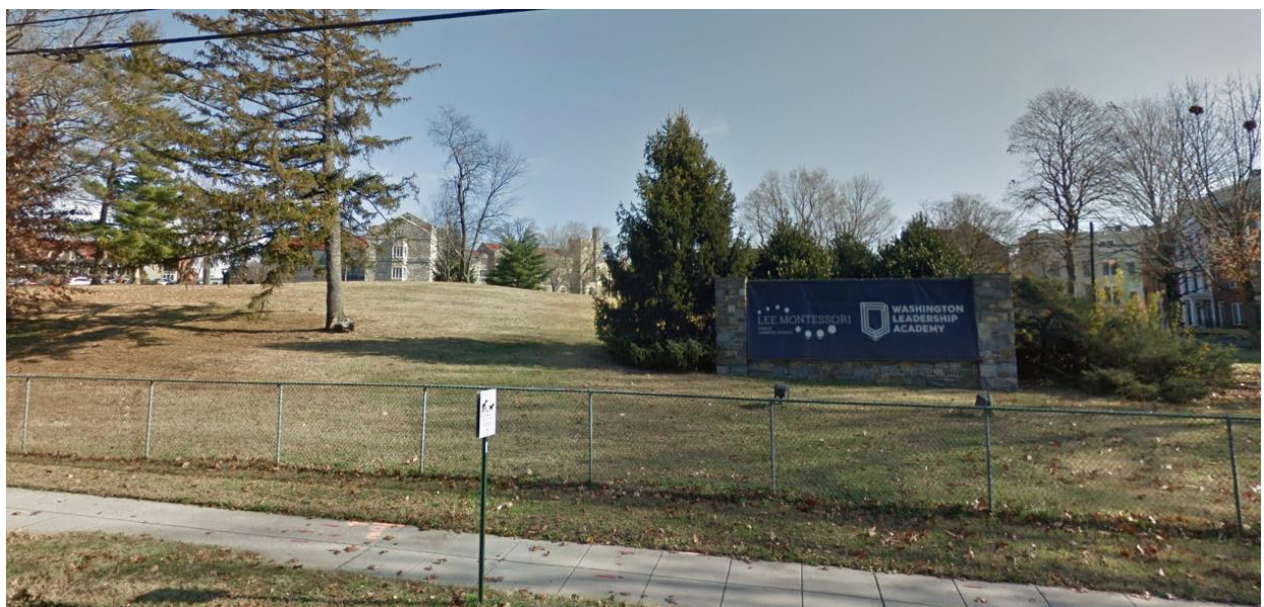
Ideally, the boundaries for the landmark would be drawn to follow the historic boundary lines of the property. But several of the intrusions have made this impossible. Comparing the competing boundaries, HPO has considered that the primary significance of the property—beyond its associations with the education of Paulist priests—lies primarily in the building’s architecture and its campus setting. The original 1914 Collegiate Gothic building exemplifies this significance through its siting at the height of the hill with its primary orientation to the southwest, still visible from 4th Street, despite the diminution of integrity of setting by previous redevelopment. The views to and from the college building are significant to understanding the building’s historic rural context, and are critical in maintaining a sense of campus, even if much of the campus has been lost. Less important is a view to the later and less-significant rear wings.

Given the importance of this viewshed, staff recommends an alternative boundary to those proposed. This boundary, as illustrated by the shaded area on the attached map, would include Lots 1068 and 1069 in their entirety, plus the southern portion of Lot 1067 (identified on the plat as the southern portion of a “Lot 1”) which has previously been proposed as an easement to protect the viewshed to the original building.

While the northern part of Lot 1067 and its treed hillside are an asset to the property and a remnant of the former farm, the woods are not visible from the original core of the college, do not provide a foreground to it, and are not critical to experiencing the building from 4th Street.

Period of significance

The proposed period of significance extends from 1914 to 1957, from construction of the original building to the completion of the last wing.



St. Paul's College - HPO Proposed Historic Landmark Boundary

