
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 18-10

Rose Lees Hardy School

1550 Foxhall Road NW

Square 1363, Lot 980

Meeting Date: March 28, 2019
Applicant: Foxhall Community Citizens Association
Affected ANC: 3D

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the Rose Lees Hardy School, 1550 Foxhall Road NW, a historic landmark in the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites. It is also recommended that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places with a recommendation for listing as of local significance, with a period of significance of 1932 to 1974, extending from its initial construction to the date of its conversion to a middle school.

Background

The property meets D.C. designation Criterion D (architecture and urbanism) and National Register Criterion C for “embody[ing] the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction,” specifically as an exemplar of a particular type and era of public school, the “extensible” school of the late 1920s to mid 1940s, erected in the growing suburbs. As such, it is eligible for designation under the multiple-property document Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1862-1960 as an example of the property subtype “The Office of the Municipal Architect, Albert L. Harris, 1921-1933.”

The property also merits designation under D.C. designation Criterion B (history) and National Register Criterion A for being “associated with historical periods, social movements, groups, institutions [D.C. Public Schools], achievements, or patterns of growth and change that contributed significantly to the heritage, culture or development of the District of Columbia.” It is a visual landmark and community center of the Foxhall neighborhood, a testament to growth of that community during the interwar period, and financed by Depression-era government programs. Although the Foxhall Village Citizens’ Association opposed a site remote from Reservoir Road, its activism was partly responsible for construction of the school. The property is also significant as the first D.C. middle school.

Named in honor of Rose Lees Hardy, an accomplished teacher in and assistant superintendent of the D.C. public schools, the building was begun in 1932-1933, and completed with a second story in 1935-1936. Hardy was one of several schools erected in 1931-1933, the consequence of a five-year plan for new schools enacted in 1925 to relieve overcrowding, catching up on a backlog that predated World War I. Construction was already outpaced by additional population growth because of the expansion of the federal government during the Depression, but the

Depression made available new capital funds. The first floor of Hardy was scarcely finished when the need for more space became obvious. Additional funds supplied by the Public Works Administration made possible its completion.

The primary historic significance of the school is its function, educating the youth of Foxhall Village and surrounding areas. By virtue of its function and siting, Hardy, like other public schools, soon became a visual landmark of its neighborhood, as well as a community center. An elementary school initially, it was converted to the city's first middle school—serving grades five through eight—in 1974, part of a reorganized “Six School Complex” of pre-high-school facilities from Georgetown to the western District line, including four elementary schools and the Fillmore arts center. Accepting older pupils, Hardy relieved crowding in the elementary schools.

Extensible schools were a clever response to demographic changes and fiscal constraints and to the architectural challenge of having to expand. Developed in the late 1920s by Municipal Architect Albert Harris, and first essayed in the prototype Langdon Elementary (designed 1928, completed 1930), the idea was to design buildings that would be built out incrementally, as need dictated and funds allowed, but at each stage resulting in a pleasing, self-contained composition. There were different forms of the extensible school, but the most ambitious for elementary schools was the H- or U-shaped building enclosing an entrance courtyard, providing plenty of outdoor space and natural light. At complete build-out, the model elementary school consisted of two, mirror-image, eight- to twelve-classroom wings joined by hyphens to a central administrative and auditorium wing, as at Lafayette (5701 Broad Branch Road), a contemporary to Hardy and a recent landmark. Like Lafayette, they typically began with a single wing, architecturally and functionally self-contained, combining both teaching and administration. Although planned and sited so that it, too, could grow into a five-part plan, Hardy was one of the many such schools that never grew beyond the single block.

The most common architectural style for extensible schools—and for schools of the second quarter of the twentieth century—was the Colonial Revival. Its adoption coincided with Harris's tenure as municipal architect; his predecessor had dabbled in the style but had favored Tudor and Elizabethan modes as more evocative of historic academic uses. The Colonial Revival had been adopted in the 1920s for local schools, reflecting a nationwide revival of interest in the country's early years and spurred by a particular fascination with the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg. The adoption of this architectural vocabulary was strongly encouraged by the United States Commission of Fine Arts, who considered it appropriate as native to the region and of a domestic scale suited to suburban residential settings and distinct from the more classical and monumental high schools.

A comprehensive historical survey of D.C. public schools in the 1990s produced a multiple-property thematic document that describes their physical development and set out standards for the designation of examples from the first century of the school system based on their significance as worthy illustrations of the development of the building type influenced by changes in urban planning, pedagogy, architectural fashion, regulation, and the modes of contracting design services. This multiple property document was adopted by the Board in 2002 and by the National Register of Historic Places in 2003. It contains registration requirements for each of the school-facility subtypes.

Hardy School meets the registration requirements of the subtype “The Office of the Municipal Architect, Albert L. Harris, 1921-1933”:

In order for schools to qualify under this property type, they must be representative of the design concepts of Albert L. Harris, the second Municipal Architect, and the urban design influence of the Commission of Fine Arts. Designs by architects in private practice should be evaluated within the context of their main body of work as well as the manner in which they met the requirements of the Municipal Architect and the Commission of Fine Arts. Subsequent additions should complement the original design, and not detract from it in any significant way. Extensible designs should be recognized at all stages of development as should interior design to accommodate new educational methods and programs....

The property retains good integrity, including the original entry portico and apparently original front doors. The windows also appear to be mostly original, as is the trim and ironwork. A couple of window openings have been bricked up on the rear. A one-story 1950s recreation building and tennis courts to the west are beyond the proposed boundary of the landmark.

The notable features of the landscape are a central lead walk through the grassy front yard and a monument to Rose Hardy. Hardscape on the north and west side of the building is actually an early feature, with the initial paving dating at least to the 1940s. Parking began south of the building in the 1950s.