
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 15-15

The Heurich-Parks House

3400 Massachusetts Avenue NW

Square 1937, Lot 806

Meeting Date: July 23, 2015
Applicant: The Massachusetts Avenue Heights Citizens Association

Affected ANC: 3C
Staff Reviewer: Tim Dennee

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the Heurich-Parks House, 3400 Massachusetts Avenue NW, a historic landmark in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites, and request that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places for listing as of local significance, with a period of significance of 1925 to 1938.

The property merits designation under District of Columbia Criterion D (“Architecture and Urbanism”) and National Register Criterion C for embodying the distinguishing characteristics of the Spanish Revival style of architecture applied to a residence on a prominent site.

Based on the information we have now, the property does not appear to merit designation under District of Columbia Criterion C (“Architecture and Urbanism”) or National Register Criterion B for association with the lives of persons significant in our past, unless perhaps for the philanthropy of the Heurich family.

Background

The home at 3400 Massachusetts Avenue was constructed in 1925 for the family of Christian Heurich Jr., son of the well-known Washington brewer. The New York interior design firm of H.F. Huber & Company was ostensibly responsible for the design, with the assistance of local architect Albert S.J. Atkinson. It was the second building on the parcel, as previous owner William H. West had erected in 1923 a one-story, structural-tile garage near the west property line, served from Edmunds Street. The Heurichs added an apartment atop the garage in 1948.

In 1938, the Heurichs expanded the main house with very compatible two-story additions at the rear and on the north side of the house, designed by the prominent Washington firm of Porter & Lockie. Fourteen years later, the Heurichs conveyed the property to Angeline Miller Parks and her husband, Dr. Marshall M. Parks. In 1960, the Parks constructed a one-story Modern wing off the north end of the house, presumably to accommodate an office for Dr. Parks’s pediatric ophthalmology practice.¹

¹ The Sanborn insurance atlas completed in December 1959 and the Baist real estate atlas of 1960 do not depict this wing. A wall-check survey of autumn 1960 indicates that it was then under construction.

Evaluation

The Heurich-Parks House is important for its association with and its contribution to the Massachusetts Avenue Heights neighborhood and to Massachusetts Avenue in general. Visually, it stands out on the avenue because of its coloration and its corner siting at the confluence of the avenue with Observatory Circle and Edmunds Street. It is probably more appropriately seen as a building contributing to the character of this section of the avenue, which developed post World War I as a continuation of the Beaux-Arts boulevard, characterized by high-style and often grand homes in new European revival styles. While it may be architecturally comparable in quality to several neighbors, the house is distinguished as an unquestionably fine example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style—and the designation criteria were crafted to recognize, among other things, “significant” design and especially worthy examples of building types and styles.

Although there are many examples of vaguely Mediterranean architecture in Washington, high-style Spanish Revival is much rarer. It is scarcer in Washington than the contemporary Tudor/Elizabethan style, for instance. Spanish Revival was understandably most popular in states that had formerly been part of the Spanish empire, and outside those, it pretty much disappeared once the Great Depression hit. The Heurich-Parks House is a fully realized embodiment of the style, which drew from Spanish colonial buildings but also from precedents in Spain itself. Its characteristic features here include: a wider-than-deep plan; red Spanish-tile roofs; stuccoed exterior walls; deep-set casement windows; a curved baroque front gable with quatrefoil decoration (a form half repeated in the parapets of the enclosed southeast porch); columns of highly figured marble supporting an entablature over the main entrance; a double-leafed entry door; an elaborated chimney; and even an iron window grille, a carry-over from Moorish architecture. It compares favorably with another example of the style, the Lanier Heights firehouse (Engine Company 21), which was designated, in part, for its architecture.

It was not their only whole-house design, but H.F. Huber and Company were principally interior designers, so such a commission as this was above and beyond their typical duties. It does not possess the grandeur of the Van Bergen House in West Lake, Illinois, let alone that of their most famous commission, Akron’s Stan Hywet Hall, but in the latter project they were responsible only for the interiors. This interior is more intimate and more modest than Stan Hywet but, in addition to copious paneling and arched openings, the parlor has a wonderful plaster cove ceiling with relief moldings in the manner of European mansions of circa 1600. Perhaps the most interesting thing about the use of Huber was that the firm had also designed much of the interior of Christian Heurich Sr.’s mansion at 1307 New Hampshire Avenue, Christian Jr.’s boyhood home.

The nomination cites D.C. Criterion C and National Register Criterion B for the property’s association with important persons, namely Christian Heurich Jr. and Dr. Marshall M. Parks. There is no doubt that these men were significant, but likely not to the extent necessary to designate the property for their sake alone. Christian Heurich is the better known because of his father, but he largely remained in his shadow. Christian Jr. was appointed treasurer of the Heurich brewery in 1926, but did not assume the presidency of the firm until his father’s death at age 102 in 1945. The elder Heurich undoubtedly relied upon his son and the other officers and executives of the firm, but he was the founder and the one most responsible for building it up. The fact that the company closed only eleven years after Christian Sr.’s death should not be laid

at the feet of the son, as that was a period of dramatic consolidation in the brewing industry. In any case, it would be difficult to claim for other figures associated with the Heurich brewery a degree of significance sufficient to designate their homes.²

After the brewery closed, Christian Jr. turned his business acumen to real estate speculation and was successful. Yet, he was one of scores of speculators that had an influence on Washington's development. The most important lasting influence was the way that the family disposed of much of its real property, namely its philanthropic donations of land for the Kennedy Center and to the Nature Conservancy. These were generous and important gifts, and Christian Jr.'s role is only somewhat diminished by the fact that a considerable amount of the family real estate was acquired by his father.

Dr. Parks appears to have been influential in the field of pediatric ophthalmology. Surely accomplished and compassionate, and perhaps innovative and influential, it is difficult to evaluate his particular contributions, because those outlined in the nomination are largely organizational. These may be important, but they would require further study.

For the reason that the owners of this property have not been demonstrated to have been especially significant, it is recommended that the property be designated for its architecture alone, and that the period of significance relate to the original Spanish Revival house and its integral 1938 side and rear additions, but not to the modernistic, albeit Spanish-inflected 1960 office addition erected by Dr. Parks. The latter may be handsome enough in its own right, but it was presumably intended to appear distinct from the Parks's residence, and it succeeded. At one story in height, it hardly overwhelms the house, and its elements included a Spanish Revival entry door, steel casements, stuccoed walls and a tiled canopy, but its long and low profile is at odds with the massing of the original to the point of detracting from the composition of the house.

A period of significance of 1925 to 1938 would effectively exclude the accessory garage/guesthouse at rear, despite that structure's initial construction episode of 1923. Originally a simple garage, a second stage of construction added a broader second story in 1948. At least part of the structure has been associated with the house for its entire history, but it does not contribute significantly to the historic character of the property, the site of a fine Spanish Revival house. Its façade is interesting in a Modernist way, but seen from the surrounding streets, it is otherwise a pretty pedestrian structure, a frame apartment with ordinary fenestration and asbestos shingles sitting atop the stuccoed structural-tile garage. The nomination offers no case for the importance of its architecture or use.

² Consistent with National Register guidance, the significance of businesspeople is more often going to be better represented by the properties where their business was conducted. But Christian Heurich Sr.'s home is also important for its architectural style and intact furnishings and for the fact that its bierstube is connected thematically to his business.



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