
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 20-02

Charles Whitney Gilmore Residence

451 Park Road NW
Square 3036, Lot 25

Meeting Date: February 27, 2020
Applicant: Historic Washington Architecture
Affected ANC: 1A

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the Charles Whitney Gilmore Residence, 451 Park Road NW, a historic landmark in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites. HPO recommends that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places for listing as of local significance, with a period of significance of 1908 to 1945, the period of Charles Gilmore's tenure.

The property meets National Register Criterion B and District of Columbia Criterion C for its association with the career of Charles Whitney Gilmore, longtime curator at the National Museum of Natural History and author of numerous and seminal works on vertebrate paleontology.

The house at 451 Park Road, designed by B. Stanley Simmons, was built in 1906, part of the first major development of the Park View neighborhood by developers Middaugh & Shannon. It is indistinguishable from its immediate neighbors, except for the fact that it shares a lovely double-bay garage with 449 Park.

The property is significant for its second owner, Charles Gilmore, a paleontologist. Gilmore became interested in natural history as a boy, collecting rocks, fossils, artifacts and animal specimens. Carrying these interests through his youth and intent on a career in museum work, he pursued a degree in mining engineering at the University of Wyoming, the school's major subject most closely related to geology. After a non-combat stint in Torrey's Rough Riders of the Spanish-American War, Gilmore continued his studies under paleontologists Wilbur C. Knight and Charles Schuchert. Their recommendations landed him a position doing field work with John Bell Hatcher, the "king" of dinosaur collectors and curator for Yale's Carnegie Museum. At this time, Gilmore discovered the first *Apatosaurus*. That proved an entrée to a job for the Carnegie preparing dinosaur skeletons for exhibit.

With the death of the Carnegie's O.C. Marsh, one of the pioneers of the field, much of Yale's vertebrate paleontology collection was transferred from the crowded museum to the Smithsonian Institution. Gilmore was essentially transferred with it, cataloging, mounting and studying the collections for the national museum. Among his early projects were the first exhibit of a reconstructed *Triceratops* skeleton and the mounting of an *Edmontosaurus* skeleton.

Gilmore purchased his Park Road house when he was promoted to “Custodian of Fossil Reptiles,” and he would reside there until his death in 1945, months after his retirement. Over that time, he participated in numerous collecting expeditions, and named many dinosaurs. His primary responsibilities remained the preparation of fossils and skeletons and their description through scores of publications and extensive notes. He and chief preparator Norman Boss would mount a 70-foot long *Diplodocus* in 1931, and it would remain the museum’s most popular exhibit for two decades.

The National Museum of Natural History is the best place to honor the Smithsonian’s paleontologists, as the building has stored the collections and housed exhibits for 110 years, and it has been the starting point for countless expeditions. It served as Gilmore’s primary office, the location of his exhibits and of most of his work. It is difficult, however, for a landmark institution to represent the distinct contributions of an individual employee. Nor does the museum itself fully capture the significance of his collecting expeditions in the West or Asia.

The Park Road house must be considered important primarily for Charles Gilmore’s 170 publications, including seminal monographs in which he named and described dinosaurs, still consulted today. While his exhibits had an impact on the popular understanding of dinosaurs, his writings had a more lasting international influence. The authorship of so many papers, atop the day-to-day business of the museum, must have been all-consuming for an academic like Gilmore, and it is unlikely that his works could have been confined to his office at the museum. Successors in the field have considered Gilmore worthy of the honor of having several dinosaurs named after him, and he has been the subject of at least one exhibit and some academic papers himself. As the home of an important scientific author, it is appropriate to recognize his home at 451 Park Road in the same way as it is appropriate to honor the home of a published poet or novelist.