
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 17-07

Folger Shakespeare Memorial Library Amendment (Interior)

201 East Capitol Street SE
Square 0760 Lot 0031

Meeting Date: July 25, 2019
Applicant: D.C. Preservation League
Affected ANC: 6B

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board not approve the amendment to the Folger Shakespeare Memorial Library as submitted. HPO instead recommends that the Board encourage the applicants and/or owners to prepare a new amendment to the Folger to be submitted in the future that will evaluate the Bond Reading Room within its appropriate context.

Preservation Background

The Folger Shakespeare Library at 201 East Capitol Street SE was designated as a DC Landmark by the Joint Committee of Landmarks in 1964 and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1969 with a Period of Significance of 1929-1932. In December 2018, HPRB approved an amendment to the National Register nomination, sponsored by the Folger Shakespeare Memorial Library, providing additional information on the history and architecture of the building and identifying interior spaces of the 1932 building, designed by Paul Phillippe Cret, for interior landmark designation.

Another amendment to the Folger Library nomination, prepared by the DC Preservation League and filed with HPO in March 2017 before the Folger Library submitted its own nomination, has remained pending and is now before HPRB. The DCPL-sponsored nomination similarly provides additional historical and architectural information on the Folger Shakespeare Memorial Library and proposes interior designation. However, the DCPL-sponsored nomination proposes an expanded Period of Significance for the property from 1932 to 1983 that includes not only the designation of the building's 1932 interior spaces, but that of the 1983 New Reading Room addition.

As part of its December 2018 designation decision, HPRB supported the staff recommendation that stated that the 1928-1932 Period of Significance *“provides an appropriate manifestation of the vision of the Folgers and their architects. However, the Folger has continued to serve as an important cultural institution through the present day and an expanded period of significance should be evaluated in the future.”* This recommendation was based upon the fact that the 1983 addition, at 36 years of age, is less than the 50-year threshold established by the National Register and that the passage of time would benefit its evaluation.

History and Architecture

A brief overview of the history and architecture of the Folger Shakespeare Memorial Library for the Period of Significance 1928-1932 was presented in the December 2018 staff report and subsequent Decision document (see attached) and is not being repeated here. The below discussion is limited to the expansion of the original building in 1959 and 1977-1983.

As completed in 1932, the Folger Library was a U-shaped building with a courtyard between the arms on the south, rear side of the building facing an alley. In 1959, an addition was constructed within this open court area comprising an underground level for the storage of rare books and other spaces, and a one-story, above-grade addition consisting of a conference room and reading room over the underground vaults. This low, flat-roofed brick addition spanned the two wings of the original building, leaving unobstructed the rear elevation of the Cret-designed building and its projecting bays of stained-glass windows that opened into the Elizabethan-designed reading room.

In 1977, based upon a study conducted to address a need for increased space for staff and readers, and to correct inadequate climate control for the collection, the Folger began a renovation and expansion project that spanned three phases and seven years. Designed by the DC-based firm Hartman-Cox Architects, who had also authored the feasibility study, the project involved the re-organization of and expansion to the 1959 underground spaces, and the addition of a reading room above (replacing the 1959 above-grade addition). The reading room, dedicated in 1982 as the Theodora Sedgwick Bond-William Ross Bond Memorial Reading Room presented both an innovative engineering solution to the constrained site and existing conditions, and a successful design approach for adding onto the 1932 Cret-designed building—widely considered then and now as a masterful piece of architecture, interior design and craftsmanship.

In order to build the addition over the 1959 underground vaults that were structurally unable to support any additional load, Hartman-Cox devised a series of L-shaped steel frames. Somewhat like flying buttresses, the frames extend as beams off the top of the exterior wall of the original Cret building and are then carried down, beyond the vaults, on piers that are supported by foundations in the new underground book stacks (an extension to the 1959 vaults). The walls and ceiling enclosing the volume of the new reading room are light steel frames hung from this steel structural system and clad on the exterior with marble.

On the exterior, the addition fills the former open court at the rear of the building. Architecturally, the innovative engineering design is appropriately respectful of and deferential to the Cret building. The exterior walls of the new reading room are clad in marble from the same Georgia quarry used for the original building, the steel beams are painted white, and the steel columns are boxed out and clad with the same marble with fluting to match that of the building's pilasters. The roof of the addition is set well below the roof of the main building, hiding the skylights and central monitor roof, along with the not insubstantial array of HVAC duct work.

On the interior, the Bond Reading Room features a long, barrel-vaulted central space with apse-like spaces at either end. A monitor roof along top of the barrel vault and clerestory windows along the sides provide natural light into the room, just as clerestory windows in the ceiling drum

in the rounded apses light these end rooms. Arched and trabeated partitions with implied rustication (scored stucco in the form of cut ashlar over gypsum board) separate the main barrel-vaulted central space from the end apses.

The addition, designed in a Post-Modern Classical style, introduced a thoroughly modern and contemporary addition to the existing work of art (the Cret building) in both a bold and deferential manner. Hartman-Cox's use of classicism mirrored Cret's own stylistic choice for the building's exterior, and at the same time it clearly differentiated itself from the highly ornate Elizabethan interiors. Hartman-Cox reportedly found inspiration for the vaulted reading room in two neo-Classical libraries: Etienne-Louis Boullée's 1785 design for the Bibliothèque Nationale and Robert Adam's 1779 design for the library of the Kenwood House in London. In addition to these precedents, Hartman-Cox's design was clearly inspired by a post-Modern architectural aesthetic that was then in its heyday.

Evaluation

The nomination argues that the Period of Significance of the Folger Shakespeare Library should extend from 1928 when planning for the building was begun to 1983 when the addition of the new reading room was completed. It argues that the building, exterior and interior, meets D.C. Designation Criteria B (History), D (Architecture and Urbanism), E (Artistry) and F (Creative Masters) and National Register Criteria A and C.

Staff believes that rather than evaluating the building under all of the above criteria with a single, expanded period of significance (1928-1982), the property should be evaluated under two periods of significance: 1928-1932 and 1982. According to the National Register Guidelines, one long period of significance is appropriate if the individual periods of significance are overlapping. If not, two periods should be considered. In this case, the documentation of the designated landmark nomination establishes that the Folger Shakespeare Memorial Library, as conceived and executed as a memorial library to house the book and manuscript collection of Henry C. and Emily Folger and associated with William Shakespeare has a clearly defined period of significance from 1928 to 1932 and meets National Register Criteria A and C (DC Designation Criteria B, D, E and F).

Based upon a review of the criteria for a period of significance of 1983, for the completion of the addition to the building, staff believes that only DC Designation Criteria D and E (National Register Criterion C) are relevant. Criterion B is not relevant because although the 1983 addition provided additional space for readers to the library and most probably enhances the staff and reader experience, it did not establish, or notably alter any mission or significance of the institution. Criterion F is not relevant because Hartman-Cox Architects has not been established as a "master architect." The firm, still actively engaged in design in DC, is a well-known and respected firm that has won many awards for its work, particularly in its historicist approach to design in a city rooted in tradition. Of particular note, in 1988, Hartman-Cox Architects won the AIA Architectural Firm Award of the year, one of the highest honors awarded in the profession. Although the nomination provides historical background on the firm and recognizes its many awards and architectural achievements, it has not rigorously analyzed the firm's work (such as and including interviewing the firm's founders), nor has it established a broader context by which to evaluate the its work from a preservation perspective.

Under Criterion D (Architecture and Urbanism) the nomination argues that the addition is a “sympathetic modern complement” and that it was at the “vanguard of historic contextualism.” The nomination makes little argument under this criterion that the new reading room “embodies the distinguishing characteristics of architectural styles, building types, or methods of construction, or are expressions of landscape architecture, engineering, urban planning, siting or design significant to the appearance and development of the District of Columbia or the nation.”

Yet, here—“embodies the distinguishing characteristics of architecture styles”—is where HPO believes the strongest argument for designation lies. The new reading room provides an excellent expression of and retains the distinctive characteristics of Post-Modern Classicism and should be evaluated in that stylistic context.

The acceptance of Modern architecture in DC, which had been slow to materialize had reached its height in the 1960s. By the late 1960s and 1970s, there was a rising interest in contextualism—projects relating to their environment and often incorporating historic buildings, or parts of buildings, into their design. This period coincided nationally with the “Post-Modern” era that ushered in a philosophical and design shift. As a style, Post-Modernism dominated from the mid-1970s through the 1990s, but peaked in 1976-1983 when the most iconic works were built¹, but has continued to express itself into the present. The Post-Modern movement emerged in the 1960s when architects and architectural theorists began to resist the Modernist premise that architecture be stripped of ornament and historic reference. Post-Modernism, although still authentically Modern in attitude, uses historical forms and elements, allusions and symbolism of the past. Robert Venturi who is considered the “father of Post-Modernism” offered the first wholesale critique of the Modern movement in his book, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (published, 1966) where he argued that architectural history through all of its styles and periods is filled with “complexities and contradictions.” He simply pointed out that the anti-historical Modernist outlook was limited and that architecture should not be an “either-or” but could be “both-and.”

Venturi and his book were extremely influential. During the mid-1970s, a group of architects (nationally and internationally) including Charles Moore, James Stirling, Michael Graves, Robert Stern, Rob and Leon Krier, Aldo Rossi and others advocated for a return to historical eclecticism as a way of enriching architectural language. Post-Modernism reached across the ages and styles and vernacular traditions, but increasingly there emerged a shared trend towards classicism. Charles Jencks, an architect and critic and contemporaneous observer of the emerging Post-Modern Movement wrote that architects adopted parts of a classical vocabulary in a “freestyle” way that was “not scholarly, academically correct, or even in some cases, well-proportioned.” In the May-June 1980 *Architectural Design* issue edited by Charles Jencks and titled “Post-Modern Classicism,” Jencks noted that a by-product of the Modern Movement and its break from the past was that it allowed the followers of Post-Modernism to “recall classicism without having to evoke its fastidiousness or academic correctness.” In fact, he noted, Post-Modern Classicism is “doubly-coded” in that it keeps modern references to the machine and modern materials and treatments such as pre-fabrication, and it uses classical elements without accepting the integrated

¹ Piazza D’Italia (Charles Moore, 1978-79); Il Teatro del Mondo (Aldo Rossi, 1979); Portland Building (Michael Graves, 1980); AT&T Building (Philip Johnson, 1984).

system of Classicism as in the past revivals. Post-Modernism and Post-Modern Classicism is also often characterized by wit and irony, where elements are used in a playful manner (i.e. Robert Venturi's Mickey Mouse Ionic), much like in the Mannerist tradition of Giulio Romano as illustrated in his Palazzo del Te (1527-1534) where oversized stucco-rusticated quoins and keystones creatively push the limits of their Classical confines of architraves and pediments.

During this "Post-Modern" period, Washington's local architectural community made significant contributions to the field of architecture, producing buildings that mix Modern design with a respect for precedent and historic buildings. According to the nomination, when Hartman-Cox established itself as a firm in DC in 1965, both principals had been "imbued with modernist principles and ideology...but they would go on to produce works in a range of styles that both celebrated and called into question modernist principles." This approach to contextualism guides the firm's work to the present. Within its contextual approach, certain examples of the firm's work (both early and more recent) can be readily classified as Post-Modern Classical. The National Permanent Building (1977) at 1775 Pennsylvania Avenue, with its multitude of exterior columns, took historicist cues from the adjacent Old Executive Office Building, yet in a boldly modern manner with modern materials and treatment that can be characterized as Post-Modern. The firm's Market Square (1990) and the Gewirz Student Center (1993) at Georgetown University Law Center with their use of out-of-proportion Classical elements applied to modern building volumes illustrate the firm's continued use of Post-Modernist design treatments into the 1990s.

Examples of Post-Modern buildings by other national and local firms can be found throughout the city. Largely limited to commercial or institutional buildings, the style is most prominently visible in the Smithsonian's Quadrangle Building (1986) by Jean Paul Carlhian; 1300 I Street NW by Johnson Burgee (1989) on Franklin Square; the AARP building (1991) by Kohn Pederson Fox and in the William B. Bryant Annex to the Prettyman Courthouse (2005) by Michael Graves. Local architect Amy Weinstein, who began her career in the office of Venturi-Scott-Brown, has embraced the style throughout her career and has left an important mark on the city, especially on Capitol Hill. While Weinstein's *oeuvre* is quintessentially Post-Modern, her influences tend to be Victorian precedents, and her architectural treatments and materials consistent with that.

The Folger Shakespeare Library Bond Reading Room epitomizes Post-Modern Classicism in its form, volume, features, materials and treatment. The inherent "complexity and contradiction" in Cret's Stripped Classical exterior and Elizabethan interior opened the door for a successful Post-Modern Classical insertion into the building. The symmetry and order of the major and minor axes through the room that are rooted in classical tradition; the expansive volume and the interplay of spaces within the larger frame; and the creative use of Classical architectural elements are all illustrative of the movement. The vaulted ceiling, hanging from its exterior shell, alludes directly to Boullée's Bibliothèque Nationale, yet it floats above the room in a playful manner characteristic of the 21st-century movement. With no supporting columns, pilasters or imposts, the arches atop trabeated openings that set off the main vaulted space from the end apses are not academically correct. The scored stucco that frames the arched and trabeated openings emulates the rusticated stonework of the Classical tradition, but the modern materials, like the movement itself, were pragmatically motivated. The rounded apse-like end rooms, with

their flat, drummed ceilings, similarly recall the 18th-century Neo-Classicism of Boulée as noted in the nomination, but the array of clerestory windows in the drum is clearly modern. Like the clerestory windows, the side skylights, visible to either side of the central vault and juxtaposed to the Classical aura of the space, offer an unabashed display of modern materials. The spatial volumes, architectural features, materials and treatments of the Bond Reading Room together exemplify the Post-Modern approach to combining the present with the past.

HPO believes that an argument can be made under the context of Post-Modern Classicism that the Folger’s Bond Reading Room meets DC Designation Criteria D and E and National Register Criterion C with a Period of Significance of 1983. The DC Historic Designation Regulations also stipulate: *“To qualify for designation, sufficient time shall have passed since they achieved significance or were constructed to permit professional evaluation of them in their historical context.”* In this case, HPO believes that additional information and an appropriate historic context will provide the information necessary to permit a professional evaluation of the addition within its 1983 period of significance.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board not approve the amendment to the Folger Shakespeare Library nomination to designate the interior of the Bond Reading Room at this time. HPO recommends that the Board request that the owner and/or applicants or other relevant entity submit a revised amendment to the Folger nomination in the future. Such a future revision should develop the appropriate historical and architectural context of Post-Modern Classicism in DC and evaluate the addition accordingly. If necessary, a revised amendment should also address how, at less than 50 years old, the Bond Reading Room has achieved significance.



DESIGNATION
Of the District of Columbia

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
In Historic Landmark Case No. 18-16

Folger Shakespeare Memorial Library amendment
201 East Capitol Street SE
Square 760, Lot 31

The Historic Preservation Review Board, having held a public hearing on December 20, 2018 on an application to amend the designation of the Folger Shakespeare Memorial Library to include additional documentation and to designate several of the building's interior spaces, did designate as protected portions of the landmark property the East Lobby; the Theater; the Exhibition Gallery; the Reading Room; part of the West Wing, including the West Lobby; the Main Stair; the Registrar Room; the West Corridor; and the Founder's Room as described and illustrated in the nomination. The Board requested that the amended nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance with a period of significance of 1929-1932, the era of its original construction.

History and Architecture

The Folger Shakespeare Library is a marble-clad gem of a building prominently located on East Capitol Street, one block east of the U.S. Capitol Grounds. Completed in 1932 to house the renowned Shakespeareana collection of Henry Clay and Emily Jordan Folger, it was designed by Paul Phillippe Cret, with Alexander B. Trowbridge serving as consulting architect. The building is widely considered exceptional in design inside and out for its Stripped Classical exterior, and its extraordinary, highly crafted Tudor and Jacobean Revival interiors. This juxtaposition of styles was intended by the designers to fulfill the Folger's vision of the building as a monument to Shakespeare and the Elizabethan era while relating to the federal buildings of Capitol Hill.

The library was conceived and funded by the Folgers, who tapped their fortune from Standard Oil and spent their married life collecting books and other materials by William Shakespeare and relating to his age. At the time of its opening in 1932, the Shakespeare Library housed more than 90,000 volumes. The building included a theater designed in the "general Elizabethan style," for the production of Shakespeare's plays in an authentic stage setting as well as for lectures and concerts. But the theater was not permitted to be used as a regular performance space due to fire code restrictions until 1970, when fire prevention strategies were undertaken and the restrictions were lifted.

The long, three-story building, covered with a flat roof concealed by a low parapet, is characterized on the exterior by its smooth, white marble walls which are divided into bays by long, narrow windows with Art Deco-inspired aluminum grilles separated by fluted pilasters and set atop carved stone spandrels. These panels, sculpted by sculptor John Gregory, depict scenes

from Shakespeare plays. On East Capitol Street, entry doors at either end of the façade are set within delicate reveals with carved bas reliefs between the top of door opening and its surround. A wide marble architrave caps the building and is bounded at the bottom by a decorative band with sunk-relief lotus motif and at the top by a fluted cap. Quotes and inscriptions are found across the building. The building was originally U-shaped in plan with an open courtyard at the rear, but in 1958, a one-story addition filled this court and. in 1983, another addition was constructed over it. On the west side of the building is a marble fountain atop which is an aluminum reproduction of the marble sculpture of Puck designed by Brenda Putnam for this location.

The Stripped Classical white-stone exterior belies the rich interiors reflecting the architectural interior styles of the Tudor and Jacobean periods (1485-1625). The authentic period-inspired interior gives the visitor the sense of visiting the world of Shakespeare. The Folgers wanted the building to be primarily devoted to the library while also containing spaces for exhibitions and performances. The interior was thus divided into three zones corresponding with these uses. The Exhibition Gallery and Reading Room span the main block of the building, while the theater occupies most of the eastern wing. The west wing accommodates the Founder's Room, a suite for use by the governing board, the Registrar's Room, Main Stair, service rooms and storage areas.

Construction of the Folger began in 1929, and the completed building was dedicated on April 23, 1932, the anniversary of Shakespeare's birth. Upon its opening, the library was highly praised by the public and architectural critics, who recognized it for its architectural beauty and for the contribution that its collection made to the city, nation and the world. The Folger was immediately recognized internationally for the study of Shakespeare and Renaissance Europe, and it has continued to pursue the mission through programming and continued acquisitions.

In 1959, the Folger conducted a renovation of the library and added a rear addition that provided offices and storage areas. By the 1970s, the enormous growth of the collections prompted examination of opportunities for continued expansion. In 1978, the architectural firm of Hartman-Cox was commissioned to design an addition to the Reading Room. Completed in 1983, the new Bond Memorial Reading Room was essentially hung from an external steel frame over the 1958 addition. The highly engineered structure encloses a spare barrel-vaulted space reflecting a Postmodern classical aesthetic on the interior.

The Folger Shakespeare Library was designated a District of Columbia landmark by the Joint Committee of Landmarks in 1964 and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1969 with a period of significance of 1929 through 1932. The property is a contributing resource within the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Evaluation

The Folger Shakespeare Library meets National Register Criterion A in the areas of literature, performing arts, and social history, as well as National Register Criterion C in the area of architecture. It is also significant under the corresponding District of Columbia designation Criteria B, D, E, and F, for history, architecture, high artistic value, and as a work of a master

architect and master craftsmen. The interior spaces described in the amended nomination are extraordinary and fundamental to understanding the building's use, history and character.

The Folger Shakespeare Library meets National Register Criterion A as an institution built to house the book and rare-manuscript collection of Henry C. and Emily J. Folger. The Folgers conceived the library as a way to open their vast collection to the public, while allowing the visitors to be visually immersed in the world of Shakespeare. Upon opening, it became an institution of great importance to the study of Shakespeare, a position that it has retained. It holds the world's largest collection of Shakespeare material, ranging from the sixteenth century to the present, as well as a world-renowned collection of books, manuscripts, and prints from Renaissance Europe.

The Folger Shakespeare Library meets National Register Criterion C as an excellent example of the work of architect Paul Philippe Cret. Cret was trained at the École des Beaux Arts in Lyon and Paris, but departed from the highly decorative Beaux-Arts style when he began to design buildings of simpler form with less ornamentation. This style, which Cret termed "New Classicism," is commonly referred to today as Stripped Classicism. The Folger is not only among the most outstanding of Cret's designs, it is also an outstanding example of the style.

The Folger Library is architecturally unparalleled for its combination of a Stripped Classical exterior with a rich Tudor and Jacobean Revival interior. The interior's oak paneling, stained glass and art tile are exceptional. The original spaces considered significant are the East and West Lobbies, the Theatre, the Exhibition Gallery, the Reading Room, the Registrar's Room, the West Corridor, Main Stairs, and the Founder's Room. Embellished with the contributions of master decorative artists and craftsmen, these spaces are distinguished by their novel appearance, high integrity and high level of detail, intended to immerse visitors in a feeling of the Bard's own era.

Even as amended, the property's period of significance remains 1928-1932, coinciding with the original planning, design and construction of the building, the manifestation of the vision of the Folgers and their architects. But the Folger has continued to serve as an important cultural institution and has been physically expanded as well; the question of a potentially lengthened period of significance should be evaluated in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marnique Heath", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marnique Heath, Chairman,
Historic Preservation Review Board