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## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD**

Historic Landmark Case No. 18-12

### **Theodore Roosevelt High School**

4301 13<sup>th</sup> Street NW

Square 2915, Lot 802

Meeting Date: September 27, 2018  
Applicant: D.C. Department of General Services  
Affected ANC: 4C

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After consideration of the Historic Landmark application, the Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate Roosevelt High School for listing in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites and that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places with a recommendation for listing at the local level of significance, with a period of significance of 1931 to 1936. HPO recommends that a revised application include information on persons of note who attended the school.

The red-brick, Colonial Revival-style high school building at 4301 13<sup>th</sup> Street was constructed on its site in 1931-1932. Roosevelt High was one of the last high schools to be constructed under the city's Five-Year School Building Program, established in the mid-1920s to relieve severe overcrowding in the city's public-school system. The building's Colonial Revival-style design is emblematic of the work of the Office of the Municipal Architect under Albert L. Harris and is an excellent example of its type and style.

### **Summary**

Roosevelt High School was founded in 1890 as Business High School, then the District's only institution devoted to instruction in business. The co-educational and segregated school had an itinerant early history until it moved into its first purpose-built home on the 800 block of Rhode Island Avenue NW in 1906. Like the city's manual training schools, of which there were several, the business program proved a successful model. With increased development and population growth after World War I, the school became crowded and remained chronically so for many years. In 1920, the Board of Education petitioned the District Commissioners to purchase a site on which to build a new and expanded business school. The selected site, the Upshur Tract in Petworth, consisted of the 35-acre Tuberculosis Hospital parcel.

Petworth, a nineteenth-century residential subdivision, was experiencing significant growth. In the first two decades of the century, only an elementary school served Petworth, making a high school within its bounds an attractive addition. Although the Board of Education had secured the Upshur Tract, it would be more than ten years before a high school was erected there. In 1923, MacFarland Junior High School was built on the parcel, leaving adequate room for a high school and, as it turned out, a public library branch.

In 1926, Congress appropriated the necessary funds for the new Business High School with \$5,000 allotted for the preparation of plans. Two years later, well before its actual construction, the Board of Education named the proposed high school building Theodore Roosevelt High School after the former president who died in 1919. This change from business to a general high school reflected an effort by the Board of Education to adopt a more well-rounded, college preparatory curriculum.

Between 1928 and 1930, plans for Roosevelt were prepared by the Office of Municipal Architect under Albert Harris; reviewed and approved by the Commission of Fine Arts, the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, and the Board of Education; and put out for bid. Construction began in 1931 and was completed by 1932, with Congressional funding coming in stages throughout the period of construction. The school boasted expansive facilities including a large and well-lit gymnasium, an auditorium, cafeteria and armory, plus an athletic stadium, built in 1936, that completed the plan.

As designed and executed, Roosevelt High School is an impressive example of the Colonial Revival style, with a five-part plan consisting of a central pavilion and two side wings connected by single-story arcades. The building is sited facing 13<sup>th</sup> Street as the street rises in elevation between Upshur and Alison streets. The central pavilion is a long rectangle with a central projecting gable and a low hipped roof, capped by a wood steeple. The side pavilions, which house the gymnasium and auditorium, feature projecting two-story porticos.

Roosevelt contains two murals painted in 1935 by artist Nelson Rosenberg as part of the Public Works Art Project (PWAP). The frescoes spanned two walls of the cafeteria. The first, "An American Panorama" is an allegorical painting of American industry and invention, and the second, "Adolescent America," focuses on entertainment and popular culture. The murals were severely damaged and as part of the 2016 renovation, portions of the murals were salvaged, removed and restored, and relocated to the enclosed courtyard lobby.

Roosevelt High School offered a complete educational curriculum, with rooms set aside for typewriting, bookkeeping, a student-run bank and other business-related activities. The school also featured a large indoor shooting range and armory. Roosevelt High School graduated many persons of note, including Diane Rehm (radio broadcaster); Abe Pollin (sports magnate); Ted Lerner (sports magnate); Bowie Kuhn (baseball commissioner); Sharon Pratt (first woman mayor of D.C.); Charlene Drew Jarvis (politician, scientist, university president); Shirley Ann Jackson (nuclear physicist); Alexander William, Jr. (federal judge); and Carmen Balthrop (internationally acclaimed opera singer).

Between 1977 and 1980, Roosevelt High School was expanded and renovated. In 2016, it was again renovated and enlarged as part of a school modernization program. This 2016 work included the enclosure of the central courtyard to create an atrium, and the construction of an entry foyer on the east side of the gymnasium wing. It also included the restoration of the cupola, and the hyphens.

### **Designation criteria**

Roosevelt Senior High School meets D.C. Designation Criteria B (History) and D (Architecture and Urbanism) and National Register Criteria A and C at the local level of significance under the

Multiple Property Document *Public School Buildings of Washington, D.C., 1862-1960*. Roosevelt High School is eligible under Criterion A because it conveys important information on the history and development of the public-school system in the District. The high school was among the last schools to be completed during an intensive school building program of the 1920s to accommodate substantial increases in student populations throughout the city.

Roosevelt High School is eligible for listing under Criterion C under the property sub-type “The Office of the Municipal Architect Albert L. Harris.” Roosevelt is an impressive Colonial-Revival building, a style Harris felt was readily adaptable to public buildings in a variety of sizes, forms and settings. Harris felt that the style conveyed a sense of dignity, simplicity and permanence, a feeling that was endorsed by the Commission of Fine Arts. Roosevelt High School exhibits quintessential elements of the style, including its five-part plan with pavilions linked by arcaded hyphens, red brick walls, porticos, limestone trim, and a central cupola.

The nomination proposes a period of significance for Roosevelt as 1928 to 1936, with 1928 representing the beginning of the design of the school and 1936 being completion of the school stadium. HPO recommends that the period instead be from 1931, when construction began on the school building to 1936 with completion of the stadium.

### **Boundaries**

Roosevelt High School shares its lot (Lot 802 in Square 2915) with MacFarland Junior High School and Petworth Library. Roosevelt is separated from MacFarland by a driveway and fence line, and from the library by the fence surrounding its stadium.