
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
Historic Landmark Designation Case No. 10-10

Kalorama Park Archaeological Site, 51NW061
1825 Columbia Road, NW
Square 2550, Lot 0818, Reservation 655

Meeting Date: September 23, 2010
Applicant: District of Columbia Department of Parks & Recreation
Affected ANC: ANC 1C
Staff Reviewer: Ruth Troccoli, City Archaeologist

After careful consideration, staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Review Board designate the Kalorama Playground Archeological Site, 51NW061, a District of Columbia Landmark. It is further recommended that the application be forwarded to the National Park Service for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.



Kalorama Playground Archaeological Site, 51NW061

Summary Statement

The Kalorama Playground Archeological Site, 51NW061, covers two acres of the three-acre Kalorama Park. The site encompasses the northern two-thirds of the park and contains intact archeological deposits and buried structural remains. The structural remains are those of the home and stables built by John Little that stood on this location from 1836 until around 1927, and the artifacts relate to the Little family, their slaves and servants, and the activities that took place there. The period of significance thus coincides with the Little family tenure, from 1836 until 1903. The site is especially important for having the potential to provide information about the enslaved inhabitants of this exurban estate.

Historical and Archaeological Background

Archaeological investigations at Kalorama Playground were initiated in 1984 to determine if archaeological resources were present. Site 51NW061 was identified and recommended eligible for listing in the National Register in 1986 but a nomination was not prepared at that time. In 2008, the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) initiated consultation with the Historic Preservation Office as part of planning to construct drainage improvements throughout the park to slow runoff and erosion from the slopes. The HPO conducted shovel tests along proposed drainage trenches (bioswales) on the west slope in 2008 and monitored the bioswale installation in 2009. Intact deposits were not encountered in the bioswale area, but a small section of a brick foundation was encountered when the contractor removed the stump of a dead magnolia tree at the northern park boundary. This fragment was an “unanticipated archaeological discovery” in an area that had been highly disturbed by construction of a sewer main, basketball court, a paved play surface, and terracing on the slope, but had been protected from those activities by the large ornamental tree. Discovery of the foundation remnant prompted DPR to hire professional archaeologists to document the discovery, determine their age and affiliation, and to complete a National Register nomination for the site. This hearing is the culmination of that effort.



The John Little House, circa 1920.

Kalorama Playground is a tiny part of much larger land patents in the Maryland colony dating from 1664. In 1727, what later became the park was added to the extensive Holmead family

property holdings until it was sold to the Hines brothers in 1828. The Hines planted a portion of the 56.5-acre parcel in mulberry trees in order to raise silkworms, but lost the property to foreclosure in 1836, when it was purchased by John Little. No buildings or structures were present on the park property at that time.

The park is situated on a knoll that would have had a commanding view of the capital and Potomac valley. John Little selected this location as the site of his farmhouse, and established a cattle farm to the east of Taylor Lane, now Columbia Road. The three-story Renaissance Revival or Italianate house that stood on the property until 1927 appears to date from the 1850s, although it may have incorporated an earlier 1836 home. Additional research and archaeological investigations may identify the location and extent of the original farmhouse.

The Little family purchased five slaves in 1839 and by 1840 eight enslaved individuals were present on the estate. Hortense Prout was born into bondage on the estate about 1841 and attempted escape in June 1861. Taking refuge among federal troops, she was quickly recaptured and remanded to the city jail for ten days and then returned to the Little farm. The account of her flight was widely reported but provides few details about her life as a slave. Six months after her escape attempt slavery was outlawed in the District. In June 1862, John Little filed for compensation for the loss of his former slaves and was awarded \$525.60 for Hortense, although he valued her loss at \$1500. Nothing is known of Hortense after Emancipation although her mother, Delilah Prout, continued to live in a cottage on the Little property and was still there in 1870.

John Little continued to operate his cattle farm, slaughterhouse and tannery until at least 1863. Upon his death in 1876 his five daughters inherited the property. They began to subdivide and sell off portions of the estate, but retained ownership of the family house. One daughter remained there until her death in 1901. The remaining heirs sold what was left of the estate to Christian Heurich, a successful brewer, in 1903. Heurich rented the former estate house to tenants and began the process of subdividing the parcel into building lots, but did not initiate construction. Neighborhood activists had lobbied Congress for a park in the vicinity for two decades before the National Park Service acquired the parcel in the 1940s and established the park. Jurisdiction over the property was transferred from the Park Service to the District government in 1972 to continue its use for recreational purposes.

Evaluation

Historical archaeology provides a powerful data set that is independent of the documentary record, and can provide material information on the lives of people that lived and worked on the property but who are virtually invisible in the documentary record. The results of archaeological investigations of this site have the unique ability to help us understand the lifeways of such people, be they enslaved or disadvantaged by economic class, status, gender, or ethnicity. Scientific archaeology of the 21st century recognizes that to excavate intact archaeological deposits destroys them, so no matter how thoroughly a site is documented and recorded, excavation causes irreparable loss. Saving the past by protecting sites intact preserves our shared cultural heritage for future generations to ponder, interpret, and manage.

Designation of this site will enhance the protections offered by District-level archaeological site management and will help ensure that all future maintenance and construction projects at the park are planned with an awareness of the historical and cultural importance of the resources that are invisible to the casual observer. District and National Register listing are recommended because this site has potential to provide information on poorly documented, but materially rich lifeways of an important segment of the population during critical periods of United States history in the 19th century. Listing at the national level especially will raise awareness of the site's presence so it is protected from accidental damage or destruction.

Because of the attempted escape of Hortense Prout in 1861, the Little house site is already part of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. This is a National Park Service program that tells the story of resistance against the institution of slavery in the United States by relating instances of flight and escape to identifiable locations and historic resources.

The Kalorama Playground Archeological Site, 51NW061, merits listing in the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register of Historic Places for meeting the following criteria:

D.C. Criterion G (archaeology) and NR Criterion D (potential for yielding information important in prehistory or history), as offering some understanding through material remains of the lives of those individuals enslaved on John Little's farm, especially Hortense Prout. It will also be helpful in comprehending the broader patterns of slavery in Washington, D.C., specifically in the suburban areas surrounding the nation's capital in the years leading to emancipation. The archaeological record has the potential to provide unique data not available in the documentary record on the lives of John Little, his family, and their enslaved workforce, including Hortense Prout.

Such archaeological remains are thus significant for and meet **D.C. Criterion A (history) and NR Criterion A (contributes to broad patterns of history)**, as representative of the institution of slavery in the District of Columbia. The site provides an avenue for understanding slavery as it operated in the functioning of a suburban household from 1839-1861. Hortense Prout's failed escape attempt in 1861 connects the site to Washington's legacy as a highly contested battleground in the national debate about slavery and as a critical point on the Underground Railroad. The Little family's house remains, preserved as an archeological site in the Kalorama Playground site, is included as a site on the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.

The **period of significance** for Kalorama Playground Archeological Site, 51NW061, extends from 1836, when John Little acquired the property and constructed a house, until 1903, when the property passed from the ownership of his heirs. The house itself was demolished about 1927. The core of the site has been tested and intact archaeological deposits are present, including the estate house foundation remains, post-Civil War outbuilding foundations, and middens. Despite many episodes of disturbance, these intact resources demonstrate the integrity of the resources and the site's further potential for information.