

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE



HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
APPLICATION FOR HISTORIC LANDMARK OR HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION

New Designation x
Amendment of a previous designation

Property name Old Korean Legation

*If any part of the **interior** is being nominated, the "interior" or portion(s) of the interior must be specifically identified above and identified and described in the narrative statements. ***Please include a boundary map of the property with your nomination form.*

Address 15 Logan Circle NW / 1500 13th Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20005

Square and lot number(s) Square 241, Lot 74

Affected Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2F

Date of construction 1877 Date of major alteration(s)

Architect(s) Thomas M. Plowman Architectural style(s) Second Empire

Original use Residence Present use Museum

Property owner The Republic of Korea

Legal address of property owner 1500 13th Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20005

NAME OF APPLICANT(S) D.C. Preservation League

Address/Telephone of applicant(s) 641 S Street NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20001

Name and title of authorized representative Rebecca Miller, Executive Director

Signature of representative  Date 2/6/24

Name and telephone of author of application Emma Lucier-Keller

Date received 2/6/2024
Case No. 24-06

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form****1. Name of Property**Historic name: Korean LegationOther names/site number: Old Korean Legation (preferred); Seth Ledyard Phelps ResidenceName of related multiple property listing: N/A**2. Location**Street & number: 1500 13th Street NW (15 Logan Circle NW)City or town: WashingtonState: DC

County: _____

Not For Publication: ☐Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:___ national ___ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B X C ___ D_____
Signature of certifying official/Title:_____
Date_____
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property _____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:_____
Date_____
Title :_____
State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
- ☐ determined eligible for the National Register
- ☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
- ☐ removed from the National Register
- ☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

Private:

☒

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

Category of Property

Building(s)

☒

District

☐

Site

☐

Structure

☐

Object

☐

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>0</u>	<u></u>	buildings
<u></u>	<u></u>	sites
<u></u>	<u></u>	structures
<u></u>	<u></u>	objects
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

1 (Contributing building in the National Register-listed Logan Circle Historic District and the larger Fourteenth Street Historic District)

6. Function or Use
Historic Functions

Government/Diplomatic Building
Residence

Current Functions

Recreation and Culture/Museum

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

Late Victorian/ Second Empire

Materials:

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick, Sandstone, Slate

Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

The Old Korean Legation at 1500 13th Street NW (historically designated 15 Logan Circle) is a grand three-story brick house designed in an ornately detailed Second Empire style by architect Thomas Plowman. Built in 1877 as a private residence for Civil War naval hero Seth Ledyard Phelps and re-purposed in 1892 as a legation for the Korean diplomatic corps, the building has frontage on Logan Circle and is one of a dozen attached Victorian-era dwellings forming one arc of the circle itself. But the dwelling's principal and longer façade, with a pair of projecting bays to either side of a central entry tower, faces 13th Street NW as that street enters the circle. The former dwelling-cum-legation is set upon a raised brick foundation with a wide sandstone water table separating the base from the principal stories above and is covered with a low mansard roof clad with slate and crowned with white-painted cast-iron cresting. The brick walls, historically painted, are unpainted today, exposing common brick laid in 7-course American bond and unstruck mortar joints. Exterior end chimneys are flush with the brick walls on the north and south sides but extend through the broad cornice and rise prominently well above the roofline. Second Empire-style wood window hoods, roof brackets and other trim add to the Second Empire-style character of the house. The hood molds and other trim are painted beige, a departure from what would have been a darker Victorian-era color.

The structure occupies a 2,434-square-foot trapezoidal-shaped lot in which its primary (east) elevation runs along the west side of 13th Street NW offering a grand entrance to Logan Circle from 13th Street. The building's south side presents a curving bay and double-story porch to the circle, while its west side is abutted by the dwelling at 14 Logan Circle, built in 1881. The rear (north) elevation of the house features a projecting bay, matching in spirit, but not in detail, that on the south (Logan Circle) side. The north elevation opens onto a short driveway with a small landscaped garden, formerly a parking area, beyond. Immediately north of the drive is another similarly massed and detailed Second Empire-style house, also designed by Thomas Plowman and built the same year.

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The building retains high integrity. The exterior is highly intact to its historic appearance and the interior retains its historic floor plan and most of its original materials and features. In December 2015, the Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation began a major renovation of the building, restoring its interior rooms with material finishes and furniture to reflect the rooms as they appeared when it served as the Korean Legation (1889-1905). Upon completion of the work in 2018, the building opened as the Old Korean Legation Museum, offering historic background on Korea-U.S. relations, the heritage of Korea, and the history of the Korean Legation in Washington, D.C.

Narrative Description

Site

The Old Korean Legation is located on the west side of 13th Street as the north-south artery intersects Logan Circle at its northwest quadrant. The building is located at the eastern end of a dozen attached, but independently built Victorian-era houses forming this remarkable arc of the circle between P Street on the west and 13th Street on the north. The building's facade faces east to 13th Street as the street enters Logan Circle (**Photos 1-3**). Originally, the house had no entry porch. In 1891, the Korean government added an iron porte-cochère along with a semicircular drive for carriages and wagons.¹ In 1950, when 13th Street was widened, the porte-cochère was removed.² As part of the recent restoration work, a new porte-cochère, based upon the historic one, was built on the site.³ A historic low black fence—wrought iron with cast-iron finials and steel gates—sets the boundary between the public sidewalk and the property's manicured lawn.⁴ (**Photos 4, 9**) Trees line the south and north edges of the east lawn. A paved one-car driveway runs adjacent to the north edge of the lawn. As noted above, the Old Korean Legation is one of a dozen attached Victorian-era dwellings fronting the circle. The structure's west wall abuts the neighboring residence, 14 Logan Circle.

On the north side, at the end of the short driveway and through a carved stone gate, or *bullomun*, is a small landscaped garden. The *bullomun*, or gate of eternal youth and the garden, was installed towards the end of the 2015-2018 renovation of the property. Visitors must pass beneath the *bullomun* to enter the garden. The stone gate symbolizes a desire to perpetuate strong Korean-American relations.⁵

¹ DC Permit to Repair #2383 (5/23/1891). The 1891 permit to repair identifies the porte-cochère as an iron structure, designed by P. Hansen Hise Manufacturing. See also, *A Restoration report on the Old Korean Legation in Washington D.C.* (Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, 2019), 32.

² Although the 1959 Sanborn Fire Insurance map shows the porte-cochère still *in situ*, it is believed to have been removed as part of the 1950 road widening. A 1960 photograph shows the house with no porte-cochère.

³ The new porte-cochère was designed and built using historic photographs of the historic one and was informed by the historic porte-cochère at the adjacent house at 1502 13th Street. The depth of the porte-cochère was shortened due the reduced depth of the front yard, and a semi-circular sidewalk laid in place of the carriage drive. The reconstructed iron structure is set upon rough-cut granite piers.

⁴ The fence which appears from historic photos to date to the early 20th century, was removed during the 2015-2018 restoration, repaired and re-installed with added entry gates.

⁵ Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, 319.

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The Old Korean Legation is within both the Logan Circle and the Greater Fourteenth Street Historic Districts. Logan Circle, part of the 1791 Plan of Washington City as laid out by Pierre (Peter) L'Enfant, was formerly known as 13th Street Circle and then Iowa Circle. The circle was renamed in 1930 to commemorate Civil War general John A. Logan. It was paved in 1873, the same year the original owner of 1500 13th Street NW, Seth Ledyard Phelps, bought the property. Phelps built the house on the site in 1877 in the early stages of a major period of development in the area as city services, such as water and gas, were installed and streets were paved. This period coincided with the increasing popularity for romantic housing styles like Victorian Gothic, Second Empire, and Romanesque Revival.⁶ The houses constructed along Logan Circle are reflective of this trend. They are all solidly built and imposing three-to four-story dwellings modeled in one these high Victorian styles. Logan Circle is the most intact of the city's Victorian circles.

Exterior Description

The Old Korean Legation building is an impressive three-story, three-bay, double-pile, Second Empire-style brick dwelling. The building is set upon a raised brick foundation, has red brick walls laid in 7-course American bond, and is covered by a low mansard roof sheathed with slate and crowned with a white-painted cast-iron cresting that terminates near exterior end chimneys on the north and south end walls. All of the windows are surmounted by robust, segmental arched hood molds that characterize the high Victorian dwelling.

East elevation

The primary (east) elevation faces 13th Street NW and is divided into three parts with a central entry bay and tower flanked by two-story projecting bays (**Photo 2**). The entry bay/tower sits slightly forward from the plane of the wall but is well recessed from the projecting bays to either side. The entry bay/tower is capped by a steep mansard roof that rises above the roof of the main block of the house. A bracketed cornice with wide eaves supports the low mansard roof of the main block while iron cresting caps the principal roofline and that of the tower. The projecting bays, rising two full stories, are capped by flat roofs similarly with iron cresting (**Photo 7**).

The front entry door, reached by a set of steep steps with heavy wood newels and railings, is located on-center of the entry bay/tower at its raised first story level and protected by the porte-cochère (**Photos 9 and 10**). The reconstructed porte-cochère is a delicate metal structure with a gable roof set upon rough-cut granite piers. As in the original, the pediment is decorated with a symbol from the *Taegeukgi*, or Korean flag, while the fascia and knee brackets feature iron filigree in geometrical patterning. The door at the top of the steps under the porte-cochère is surmounted by a robust segmental arch hood mold with a central keystone and features a pair of tall, wood paneled doors. The doors have raised wood panels with bolelection molds. The upper panels of the tall doors are filled with glass, admitting light into the entry vestibule.

⁶ Logan Circle Community Association, D.C. Preservation League, Traceries, and D.C. Preservation Historic Division, *Greater Fourteenth Street and Logan Circle Historic Districts* (Washington D.C.: D.C. Preservation Historic Division, 1997), 5; Emily Hotaling Eig and Kim Prothro Williams, "The Greater Fourteenth Street Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination, received July 15, 1994, listed November 9, 1994; District of Columbia Land Records, Deed Book 735, 170.

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Above the entry door, the upper levels of the entry bay/tower have pairs of narrow 1/1 wood sash windows with heavy hood molds and sandstone sills. These hood molds, like all the others on the houses, are sheathed in metal and painted. It is not clear whether the molds themselves are wood or another material but the metal sheathing appears historic. The third story of the entry bay/tower, is capped by a tall mansard roof with cast-iron cresting like that of the principal roof line. The mansard roof which rises above and projects forward from the low mansard of the principal roof, is supported by the projecting cornice below. A pair of oval windows with molded surrounds punctuates the (east) slope of the tower roof.

The projecting bays to either side extend from ground level to the building's third story. Like the main roof and the entry tower, these flat-roofed bays are capped by bracketed cornices and iron cresting at the roof line. The windows in the bays are paired, and like the windows elsewhere, have heavy hood molds and feature 1/1 wood sash.

South elevation

The south side of the building facing Logan Circle features a semi-circular projecting bay and a double-story porch next to it (**Photos 3-6**). The mansard roof and cornice bend with the curve of the bay and then straighten out until abutting the neighboring structure, 14 Logan Circle. An exterior end chimney with recessed brick panels runs down the center of the three-story projecting bay, curving with the rounded arch of the bay, and extending above its roofline. On either side of the chimney, single, 1/1 double-hung windows with hood molds and keystones are located on each of the three stories. The straight segment of wall that continues from the three-story projecting bay to the neighboring house is fitted with a double-story porch with an enclosed conservatory space at the first story and the open porch above. The enclosed lower conservatory section has four long and narrow windows separated by narrow Eastlake pilasters. The open porch, formed by slender columns supporting Gothic arched bays, is ornamented with incised vergeboard detailing. This porch feature is more delicate in detail compared to the robust Second Empire-style features elsewhere, yet aspects of it, like the incised vegetal design of the vergeboard is also found on the brackets of the principal roof. The porch is covered by a sloped roof with a gentle curve to it.

A pair of narrow 1/1 windows with hood molds occupies the flat wall surface of the third story above the double-story projecting porch.

North elevation

The north elevation features a three-story, three-sided projecting bay with an exterior end chimney running up its center, through the overhanging cornice, and extending above the roof line as on the south elevation (**Photo 8**). On each floor, flanking the chimney, are 1/1 double-hung, sash windows with hood molds and keystones like those elsewhere on the building. The mansard roof line and cornice terminate with this three-story bay window. To the west of the projecting bay, the building's north elevation is a planar brick wall surface with two single windows on each of the three stories. Unlike the 1/1 windows found elsewhere, these windows have 2/2 wood sash.

Across the exterior of the building, the window hoods, the cornice and double-story porch appear to be of wood, sheathed in sheet metal and painted. This metal cladding, which appears to be

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historic, if not original, is apparent in the slightly wavering surface appearance and small nail heads.⁷

Raised Basement

A wide sandstone beltcourse clearly differentiates the raised basement level from the principal stories. An English basement entry door, reached by a steep but short flight of stairs, is tucked under the stairs ascending to the first story, while single 1/1 double-hung windows are symmetrically arranged to the bays of windows above.

Interior

The former residence turned Korean Legation and now the Old Korean Legation Museum has a central hall, four-room plan with a stair running along the north side wall of the hall. The room configuration is intact to its original 1877 residential spatial arrangement, while each of the rooms reflects the use of the spaces when the building served as the Korean Legation from 1889 to 1905. The rooms on the first and second floors were finished and furnished during the 2015-2018 renovation of the building, based on historic documents, including photographs and room inventories. The third floor, which served as sleeping quarters for legation staff, was converted into an exhibit space during the 2015-2018 renovation project.

First Floor

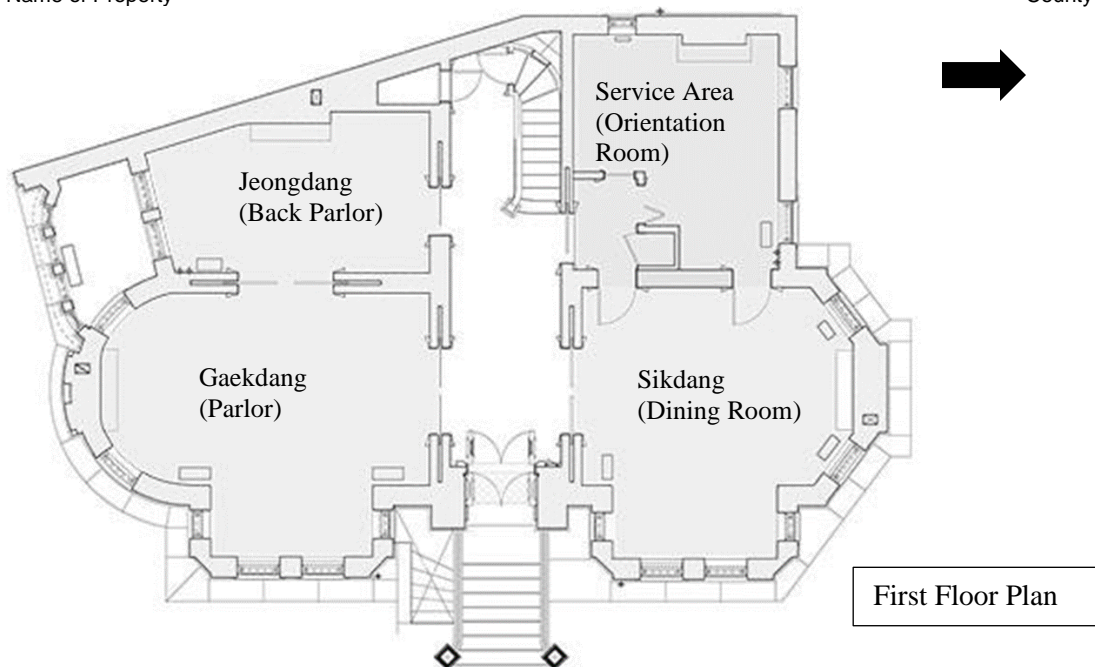
The primary entrance on 13th Street leads into a shallow vestibule with a pair of wooden doors opening into the central hall. Long stained glass windows (not historic) fill the central panels of both doors, while recessed wooden panels occupy the lower portion and clear glass fills the upper panels. The floor of the vestibule is marble with a black and white diamond pattern and the walls are wood paneled.

The hall extends from this vestibule to the stairs at the back of the hall against its north side. Four doors open off the hall into the four rooms: a large front parlor or receiving room (*gaekdang*) occupies the rounded bay to the south facing Logan Circle and the projecting bay to the east facing 13th Street; a dining room (*sikdang*) occupies the projecting bay to the north and the projecting bay to the east; a back parlor (*jeongdang*) to the west and behind the front parlor served as a ceremonial room. This room opened into the enclosed sun-filled porch or conservatory-type space. A service area, now museum orientation room, occupies the space behind the dining room.

⁷ The same condition appears on the neighboring house at 1502 13th Street NW, indicating that the sheathing is not a recent alteration.

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The front rooms are entered from the hall through wide openings with wooden sliding pocket doors and molded wood door trim. The front and rear parlors on the south side are in turn connected by sliding double pocket doors. Original wood door and window trim, original wood floors (covered with carpets), original plaster walls and ceilings with crown molding, and original ornate wooden Eastlake fireplace mantels survive intact throughout the house.

The front parlor, *gaekdang*, served as a reception room for greeting guests (**Photo 11**). It has been finished and furnished to mimic the interiors of the room as gleaned from an 1893 interior photo of the room by photojournalist Frances Benjamin Johnston. Johnston featured the photo in *Demorest Family Magazine* (July 1893) as part of her series to introduce the foreign legations in Washington, D.C. Portraits of the legation officers are displayed on side tables and the fireplace mantel. Following the three-part horizontal emphasis of the Eastlake style, white molding and a contrasting wallpaper border divides the wall into three horizontal parts. Dark wood trim frames the doorways and windows and a low-hanging chandelier (not original to the house) reflects light against a white marbled ceiling.

The *sikdang*, the dining room, features original dark wood door and window trim and an Eastlake fireplace mantel with mirrored overmantel (**Photo 12**). The walls have been finished with red wallpaper with a contrasting border featuring leaf and floral elements in purple, yellow, and green tones. The fireplace and mantel along the north wall between the bay windows and on-axis with the door, is a central fixture to the room.

The back parlor, *jeongdang*, was the most important and symbolic space in the Korean Legation building (**Photo 14-15**). The back parlor was used to enshrine the portraits of the king and crown

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prince and to perform the ceremony of bowing toward the direction of the palace in Korea on meaningful days such as on the first and fifteenth days of the lunar month and the day of the king's birth. This narrow parlor room is located on-axis with the exterior enclosed porch, or conservatory space, on the south side of the building. A pair of long, tall windows opens onto the unfurnished, enclosed conservatory space.

A service area, now a museum orientation room, historically included a butler's pantry and a dumbwaiter. An exposed brick wall in this room reveals evidence of a set of servant stairs, tucked behind the main staircase (**Photo 16**).

The principal stair against the north wall of the house leads to the upper levels (**Photo 20-21**). It is an elegant, closed stringer stair that curves around the stair landings between the floors. A robust Eastlake wooden newel post with decorative wood detailing in a lighter wood applied to it grounds the stair at the first floor, while more attenuated balusters and a molded handrail follow the stair from the first to the third floors.

Second floor

Privacy increased with each floor of the building. While the first-floor rooms served the public and visitors, those above were dedicated to legation officials and consisted of two offices, a bedroom, library, two bathrooms, and a balcony. The bedroom, historically for the Korean minister, sits directly above the reception or front parlor below. It occupies the rounded bay facing Logan Circle and the projecting bay facing 13th Street. It has original wood floors, coved wood crown molding, wood Eastlake mantel and several wood paneled doors adjoining the hall, the bathroom and the adjoining minister's office (**Photo 17-18**).

The minister's office is located west of the bedroom and is accessible either directly from the stair landing/hall, or through the shared door from the bedroom. The office windows open onto the second story balcony. A second office for staff is located across the hall from the master bedroom, directly above the *sikdang*. It shares its west wall with the library, which looks out onto the north yard. There are two bathrooms. The master suite has its own private entrance along the bedroom's north wall. The second bathroom shares the library's south wall.

Third floor

Historically, the third floor housed three rooms for legation staff and a bathroom with a washstand, spittoon, and bathtub.⁸ In 1898, a fire destroyed much of the room, though it was repaired. Then, sometime between October 1943 and December 1958, when the property served as an office to the Teamsters Local No. 639, partitions between the rooms were removed, creating the open floor plan that exists today.⁹ A circular skylight located above the stairwell survives. Currently, the open third floor provides exhibit space for the museum (**Photo 19**).

⁸ Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, 36.

⁹ Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, 32; District of Columbia Land Records, Deed Book 11180, 533.

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Basement

As of 1900, the basement housed the furnace room, billiard room, kitchen, water closet with a bathtub, pantry, and laundry with a fireplace. The basement has three access points: from the east beneath the front door stairwell, north entry at ground level, and an interior entry via a stairwell behind the first-floor stairs. The basement now serves as an office, archive, and machine room with a bathroom.¹⁰

The interior of the Old Korean Legation is highly intact with original materials from wood floors and trim to more ornate features, like mantels reflecting Eastlake interior design. The Aesthetic Movement of the late 1800s promoted the idea that art could be found in the most ordinary of household items, not exclusive to paintings and architecture. Architectural and design writers like Charles L. Eastlake, author of *Hints on Household Taste*, saw the need to educate homeowners on proper house design. Interior furnishings and décor, he argued, should be functional, rectilinear, and the material identifiable even if stylized; Eastlake, like many of his peers, identified Gothic as the most suitable style to reflect these principles.¹¹ As popularized by manufacturers, the Eastlake name came to broadly refer to oak, walnut, and ebonized furniture with spindle, chamfering, and incised geometrical decoration.¹² *Hints on Household Taste* was available to the English homeowner as early as 1868. Eastlake's directive on household design reached the U.S. in 1872.¹³ The following year, Seth Phelps purchased the lot and soon began work on his home.

The motifs promoted by Eastlake and the nineteenth-century Aesthetic Movement can also be seen in the exterior treatment of the Old Korean Legation building. For example, incised into each tin molded bracket is an Eastlake inspired design. This pattern is repeated in the ornamentation of the second story balcony fascia and the porte-cochère brackets.

Alterations

The Korean Legation has seen some alterations over the decades. The most significant involves the construction, removal and later reconstruction of the porte-cochère. Constructed by the Koreans in 1891, it was removed in 1950 when 13th Street was widened. Then as part of the 2015-2018 renovation, it was reconstructed using an 1893 photograph and taking cues from the similarly designed porte-cochère of the neighboring house at 1502 13th Street.

An 1898 fire, originating in a defective chimney flue, gutted the third-floor quarters.¹⁴ The space was repaired, but later altered by the Teamsters local at the end of 1943, when a partition was removed to create a larger room. The kitchen at some point was moved from the basement to the first floor in the second half of the twentieth century.

¹⁰ *A Restoration report on the Old Korean Legation in Washington D.C.* (Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, 2019), 36-39.

¹¹ Charles L. Eastlake, *Hints on household taste in furniture, upholstery, and other details* (Boston: J. R. Osgood and company, 1872), 13; Mary Jean Smith Madigan, "The Influence of Charles Locke Eastlake on American Furniture Manufacture, 1870-90," *Winterthur Portfolio* 10 (1975): 1.

¹² Joanna Banham, *Victorian Interior Design* (New York: Crescent Books, 1991), 77-78.

¹³ McClaugherty, 3.

¹⁴ "Fire at the Korean Legation," *The Times*, April 9, 1898.

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Restoration work conducted by Korea's Cultural Heritage Administration intended to return the Old Korean Legation to an interpretive period reflecting its use by the Korean Legation (1889 to 1905). The exterior walls were repointed, the roof was repaired and the systems were updated to bring the building up to code.¹⁵ The interiors were restored with finishes and furnishings based upon historical documentation from newspapers, photographs, and inventory records begun for insurance purposes after the 1898 fire.

INTEGRITY

The Old Korean Legation building maintains high integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The building is located on its original site on Logan Circle's northwest quadrant at the intersection of 13th Street NW. The Second Empire-style former dwelling retains its historic setting and is part of a remarkable collection of surrounding high-Victorian residences. The building's original Second Empire-style design and materials with Eastlake influences is intact and in excellent condition. The building is currently occupied as the Old Korean Legation Museum, conveying integrity of feeling and association.

¹⁵ Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, 43-44.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

Ethnic Heritage/Asian
Politics/Government

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Period of Significance

1889-1905

Significant Dates

1889

1905

Significant Person

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Thomas M. Plowman, architect

Joseph Williams, builder

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The Old Korean Legation, located at 1500 13th Street NW (known historically as 15 Logan Circle NW), is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A with Ethnic Heritage (Asian) and Politics/Government as its Areas of Significance. Built in 1877 as a private residence, the mansion was re-purposed in 1889 by the Kingdom of Korea for use as its legation. The building is significant for its association with Korea's first permanent diplomatic mission to the United States and for its association with Korea's nation-building efforts in the late 19th century and its struggle for independence in the 20th century. The building is also notable for its support to the first generation of Korean Americans and the education of Korean university students to foster their success in America and back home.

After a rocky start to its relationship with the United States, the Kingdom of Korea saw an advantage to establishing ties with foreign powers whose influence might balance that of its stronger neighbors. Following a successful diplomatic mission to the United States in 1883, the Korean government resolved to establish a permanent legation in Washington, stepping onto the world stage and out of the shadow of its former suzerain, the Chinese empire.

In 1889, the legation took up residence in suitably prominent and tasteful Second-Empire-style mansion in fashionable Logan Circle, and its activities were of great interest to Washingtonians. A principal duty of the minister and staff was the delicate work of playing the Chinese, Japanese and Russian interests off each other, trying to maintain Korean sovereignty and autonomy. The promotion of trade and technological exchange with America was another priority. And, at the beginning of a new century, the legation was thrust into the position of protecting the interests of

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the first wave of Korean immigrants to the U.S., several thousand laborers hired to sugar and pineapple plantations in the territory of Hawai'i.

The legation's consular duties were extended to supporting scores of students, financially and logistically, who studied at Howard University, the George Washington University, and Salem, Virginia's Roanoke College and others, with the intention of putting their skills to use in a modernizing Korea. The Old Korean Legation is associated with many firsts in Korean educational achievements, nativity, and citizenship in America.

The legation in the United States was forced to close its doors after the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1905. Also known as the Eulsa Treaty, it was signed by Korea under duress, and the country became a protectorate and colony of Japan until the end of World War II. For a time, the shuttered legation was a rallying point for the independence movement in exile, representing the hope that it would one day represent a free Korea. Within five years, however, in September 1910, the Japanese government sold the former legation to U.S. citizen Horace K. Fulton who renovated the building for residential use. By 1943, the property was headquarters for Local 639 of the Teamsters Union. It was later an office of the National Council of Negro Women. Returning to residential use in 1977—with proceeds of the sale to benefit the Logan Circle Community Association—it was finally purchased October 18, 2012 by the Republic of Korea, with the intention of creating a museum to commemorate the country's legation. In its recent repurchase after 102 years and restoration by the Republic of Korea, the building is a symbol of national pride.

The building is connected to several figures prominent in the modernization and independence movements of Korea. It also illustrates the beginnings of Korean immigration to and educational, scientific and literary achievement in the United States. The Old Korean Legation is a unique example of a tangible space associated with members of a minority community, because of its prominence, its preservation, and its interpretation.

The Old Korean Legation is already recognized as a contributing building in the National Register-listed Logan Circle and the Fourteenth Street historic districts under Criterion C. The dwelling is a fine example of a Second Empire residence and part of a collection of many stylistically fashionable dwellings designed in a variety of Victorian-era styles and constructed during an important period of development in the neighborhood. This nomination does not, therefore, address Criterion C, but instead recognizes the building's historic use as the Korean Legation under Criterion A and the historic context established below.

The period of significance is defined by the years the property served as the Korean Legation from 1889 to 1905.

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Narrative Statement of Significance

CRITERION A--Ethnic Heritage (Asian) and Politics/Government

Events leading to the establishment of a Korean diplomatic mission in the U.S., 1866-1888

When the United States expanded its international relations to the Far East, the country was inserting itself into an historical timeline much older than 1776. The events which led to the establishment of a permanent Korean mission in the United States have a relatively short history but are rooted in international politics centuries old. The political entanglements between Korea, China, Japan, and Russia cannot be fully explored here, but an overview of these historical relationships is provided in an effort to contextualize the importance of Korea's U.S. legation, and it is drawn from Yur-Bok Lee's *Establishment of a Korean legation in the United States, 1887-1890: a study of conflict between the Confucian world Order and modern international relations*; Mike Mansfield's essay, "American diplomatic relations with Korea (1866-1910)"; and research synthesized by the 1882 Foundation in a draft *D.C. Asian American Historic Context* to be released in 2024.

It would have been difficult to imagine any successful diplomatic agreement emerging from U.S.-Korea interactions between 1866 and 1880. In 1866, the American steamer, General Sherman, was burned and all its crew killed during a trading expedition to Korea. The United States made a formal protest to Prince Kung (Yixin, 1833-1898), the acting Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, since Korea was considered a tributary of China. Prince Kung replied that Korea's tributary status to China was ceremonial, and nothing could be done on his end.¹⁶ Thus, U.S. vessels were dispatched during the next two years to investigate the Sherman incident, without success.

In 1871, F.F. Low, then serving as American minister to China, was tasked with opening Korea and negotiating a treaty that would protect future shipwrecked mariners. Acknowledging Korea's tributary status, Low sent a letter to China requesting the empire to notify Korea of his interest in treaty negotiations and the imminent arrival of his delegation. China denied the request, again arguing that Korea was independent concerning foreign relations. Upon his arrival, Low's survey party was fired upon, and Low retaliated with force, resulting in the death of 250 Koreans. The U.S. party occupied five coastal forts and awaited a response from King Gojong. Met with silence, they eventually left Korea.¹⁷

By 1881, the Korean empire was warming to the idea of a treaty with the United States. Japan was pressing upon its coasts, and Russia threatened in the north, and Korea looked for other powers to balance its neighbors. On the American side, Commodore Robert W. Shufeldt was charged with making another attempt to open relations. While trying to gain Chinese assistance in contacting the Korean monarch, Shufeldt received word of that country's interest in establishing a treaty of peace and commerce. The major component of this treaty would be protection for shipwrecked

¹⁶ Mike Mansfield, "American diplomatic relations with Korea (1866-1910)," master's thesis, (University of Montana, 1934), 3-4.

¹⁷ Mansfield, 10-13.

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American vessels and crews.¹⁸ Korea received a promise of diplomatic assistance in the occurrence of threats from other powers. China demanded a clause recognizing Korea as a tributary of the empire. Although this statement never made it into the final version, after the document was signed, the King Gojong sent a letter to the American president acknowledging the kingdom's dependent status, which was ignored due to the contradiction.¹⁹ On May 22, 1882, the Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce, and Navigation formalized. Article II established the right of both countries to receive the other's diplomatic representatives.

After the initial special mission, *Bobingsa*, in 1883, Korea sent its first permanent diplomatic envoy to the United States in late 1887. Park Jeong-yang (Pak Chung Yang) bore the official title of envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary. He was supported by legation officials such as Yi Wan-yong, councilor; Yi Chae-yeon (Ye Cha Yun), translator; Yi Ha-young, secretary; Yi Sang-jae, assistant secretary; and foreign counselor Horace Allen. Additional legation staff included attachés Kang Jin-hui and Yi Heon-yong; attendant/guard Yi Jong-ha; and servants Kim No-mi and Ho Yong-eop.²⁰



***Park Jeong-yang, first resident
Korean minister to the United States.
Courtesy of Park Chansu, grandson
of Park Jeong-yang.***

¹⁸ Mansfield, 21-22.

¹⁹ Mansfield, 25.

²⁰ Yur-Bok Lee, *Establishment of a Korean legation in the United States, 1887-1890: a study of conflict between the Confucian world Order and modern international relations* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois, Center for Asian Studies, 1983. N.B.: The transliteration of Korean names varies, and the system for Romanization of Korean was revised in 2000. More recent scholarship Romanizes these names differently, and the text reflects this. A few of the positions of legation staff have been supplied by the Old Korean Legation Museum staff in notes on Romanization.

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As the twentieth century approached, Washington D.C. was becoming a world stage. By 1898 it housed the representatives of at least Argentina, Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Denmark, El Salvador, France, Germany, Great Britain, Guatemala, Honduras, Japan, Nicaragua, Norway, Peru, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Venezuela.²¹ When Korea established its own legation in the U.S. capital, it was exercising the same right as every other independent country before it. Korea was communicating its desire to be recognized as a sovereign nation. The Korean Legation furthered this cause by challenging China's suzerainty.

***The Korean Legation presenting its
credentials to President Glover Cleveland.
Fall River Daily Herald, January 27, 1888.***



Failing to prevent Korea sending a legation abroad, China sought to maintain its tributary status. The emperor's ministers mandated that once the legation arrived, it must report to the Chinese minister, who would present the mission to President Cleveland. China also dictated that the legation must receive prior approval from China's representatives in D.C. on all major actions. Korea ignored these directives.²² The Korean Legation arrived in Washington, D.C., on January 9, 1888, and presented its credentials to the president unaccompanied by Chinese diplomats. China demanded Korea punish Minister Park for his defiance. Minister Park soon returned to Korea because of ill health, but instead of receiving discipline for his actions, he was promoted to chief

²¹ "From Many Lands: The Members of the Diplomatic Corps in Washington," *The Evening Star*, October 30, 1897; John DeFerrari, Douglas P. Sefton and Zachary Burt, "Old Chinese Legation," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2024.

²² Mansfield, 42.

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advisor and, later, to the positions of minister of justice and minister of finance.²³ The legation had become an instrument in and symbol of Korea's fight for recognition as an independent state.

A Korean Legation property

Korea's legation was first housed at 1513 O Street NW as of January 18, 1888.²⁴ That building no longer stands, making its subsequent home, 1500 13th Street, the most tangible remnant of early Korea-U.S. diplomacy. A notice, which read "[t]he Corean Legation is being moved into the new legation building, No. 1500 13th street, Iowa circle..." was posted under the *Evening Star's* "Social Matters" column on February 14, 1889.²⁵

The square on which the building stands was resubdivided by developer E. Kingman in 1857, and Lot 61 was purchased for \$4,437.50 on October 22, 1873, by Seth Ledyard Phelps. Further resubdivisions of 1877 and 1878, partly for the purpose of erecting Phelps's residence, resulted in the renumbering of the lot as 74.²⁶ The Phelps house was designed by Thomas M. Plowman and built by Joseph Williams in 1877. It is a very fine example of a Second Empire-style residence, part and parcel of a neighborhood of similarly stylish homes. The 1880 census records the occupants as Phelps and his wife, Lizzie, plus three servants: John Hull, B. E. Thompson, and Mary Griffith.²⁷

Seth Ledyard Phelps (1824-1885) began his 24-year Navy career in 1841 at the age of 17, with his final years serving the Union in the Civil War. After retirement, Phelps was appointed as one of the first commissioners of the District of Columbia in 1875 and later as minister to Peru. Phelps passed away at Lima in 1885.²⁸ Upon his death, the house was left to his wife. The will stipulated that, if Lizzie Phelps were to die, then the property would convey to their only child, Sally M. P. Brown, and her children.²⁹ Sally had married to Sevellon A. Brown, chief clerk of the State Department. He would be among those to receive Korea's first permanent legation to Washington three years later.³⁰ It is not a coincidence then that the Korean Legation came to reside in the home of diplomats a year after its arrival in Washington. The Phelps/Brown family rented the house to the Korean government from 1889 until December 1, 1891, when King Gojong acquired the property for \$25,000.³¹

²³ Lee, 19-20, 23-24.

²⁴ Lee, 20.

²⁵ "Social Matters: What is Going on in Fashionable Society-Personal Notes," *The Evening Star*, February 14, 1889.

²⁶ District of Columbia Office of Surveyor Subdivision Book B, 187, Book JHK, 217, Book JHK, 301; District of Columbia Land Records, Deed Book 735, 170.

²⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census. Tenth Decennial Census. Population Schedules for the District of Columbia. 1880.

²⁸ "The Late Capt. S.L. Phelps," *The Evening Star*, June 25, 1885.

²⁹ Lizzie M. Phelps v. Sally M. P. Brown and Sevellon A. Brown, et. al., Equity Case No. 13231 (1891), U.S. District Court National Archives and Records Administration Record Group 21.

³⁰ Lee, 19.

³¹ Phelps v. Browns, et al.; District of Columbia Land Records, Deed Book 1617, 495.

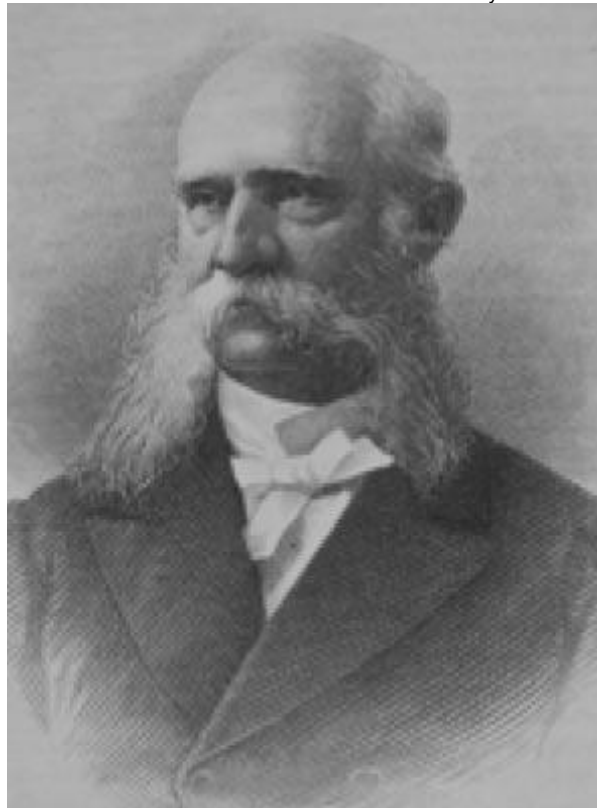
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Seth Ledyard Phelps, 1824-1885.
Findagrave.com/memorial/37224690/
seth-ledyard-phelps



Yi Chae-yeon, now chargé d'affaires, and his wife, Lady Yi of the Seongju Bae clan, directed the building's renovation, including the addition of a porte-cochère on the 13th Street side.

The Koreans are essentially a progressive people and of this assertion there is no stronger proof than is presented in the hospitable Korean legation residence on Iowa circle.... Extensive improvements have already been started, and before the opening of another official season the addition of a spacious ball room, opening off from the dining hall, will be completed, as well as the enlarging of the upper chambers through the pulling down of the partition walls.... These important changes will be followed by a thorough refurnishing and fresh interior decorations. With this view the secretary and his enthusiastic little wife, acting in unison, have been busily engaged for some weeks past in the selection of furnishings for their American home...³²

An 1893 article in *Demorest's Family Magazine* published photographs of several rooms, describing the spaces as "tasteful," with "extremely modern quarters, where all the newest accessories, from steam heat and electric bells to furnishing of brocade satin, and plush" could be found.³³

³² "The Korean Legation" *The Evening Star*, July 4, 1891.

³³ "The Foreign Legations at Washington," *Demorest's Family Magazine*, Vol. XXIX, No. 7, (May 1893), 523-525.

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*Above: The Korean Legation, 1893, by Frances B. Johnston. Collection of the Huntington Library.
Below: 4-8 Logan Circle Northwest, 1971. Logan Circle Historic District National Register nomination. Fred Figall, photographer.*



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*Legation interiors.
Top: The parlor, by Frances B.
Johnston. Collection of the
Huntington Library.
Bottom: The entry hall. The
Evening Star, August 15, 1896.*

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International events, 1888-1905

In the late 1800s, Korea was forced to engage with more powerful nations all vying for access to the region's resources and strategic geography. Diplomatic engagement with the U.S. was a strategy through which the ruling Joseon dynasty hoped to maintain its independence from neighbors China and Japan. The bilateral treaty ushered in the arrival of American diplomats, businesspeople, and missionaries. But it corresponded with a period of intense governmental instability, characterized by precipitous shifts in influence among internal factions supported by China, Japan, and Russia.

In June 1882, Heungseon Daewongun (or Yi Ha-ung, Prince Gung), King Gojong's father and former regent, led a revolt to reclaim the power of the monarchy from foreign influence. The Japanese legation was burned and, failing to sustain his position, the prince was escorted to and detained in China. Two years later, an extreme reformist movement staged a coup with the support of the Japanese legation, to rid the country of what they considered to be corrupt forces in government obstructing the country's advancement. Bloody and badly planned, the Gapsin Coup lasted a few days, and the leaders were forced to flee. A third insurrection in 1894, the Donghak peasants uprising, was spurred by high taxes, government corruption and foreign interference. It led to famine and a military standoff between Japan and China, both of whom deployed troops to the peninsula to re-establish order on its own terms. Ye Seung Su, Korean chargé d'affaires in Washington, forwarded his government's request for assistance to the Americans, citing Article I of the 1882 treaty: "If other powers deal unjustly or oppressively with either Government, the other will exert their good offices on being informed of the case to bring about an amicable arrangement, thus showing their friendly feelings." The United States reached out to the Japanese legation to appeal for Korea.

In August 1894, Japan and China declared war. The conflict reverberated in Washington. On September 9, 1894, the Sunday edition of the *Morning News* reported on the tense interactions between the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean legations. Just as China and Japan jockeyed for control of the peninsula, their representatives in the U.S. attempted to outmaneuver each other as they sought the attention of Korea's minister. "If the members of the Korean legation are seen at the theater with the Chinese one night, it is reasonably certain that they will be found at another theater with the Japanese on the following evening." In February 1895, a month before Japan declared victory, the Korean Legation refused to adopt the upcoming Chinese calendar, another statement of its sovereignty.

The Sino-Japanese War ended April 17, 1895, with a peace treaty signed at Shimonoseki, Japan. Included was recognition of Korea's sovereignty, signaling an end to Chinese suzerainty. But with the assassination of Queen Min by Japanese agents, the monarchy immediately began to turn to Russia to balance Japan. Under the pretense of protecting Korea's sovereignty, Japan declared war on Russia on February 10, 1905. Japan then brokered an alliance with Korea to gain access to Korean ports for military operations. Russia's ignominious defeat in 1905 meant unchallenged Japanese control of the Korean peninsula, and the United States and Great Britain recognized Japan's sphere of influence there.

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A forced treaty of November 1905 gave Japan control of Korea's foreign affairs. In December of 1905, the Korean Legation in Washington was forced to close its doors, and the United States ceased recognizing Korean passports. In the next five years, Japan extended its power over all of Korea's governing and policing infrastructure, finally annexing the country on August 22, 1910.³⁴ The Korean Legation building is associated with this important historical event. One week after annexation, on September 1, 1910, the shuttered building was reportedly conveyed to Japanese minister Baron Yasuya Uchida for \$5.³⁵ The same day, Uchida sold the former legation to U.S. citizen Horace K. Fulton.³⁶ It would be another 102 years before the property's ownership was returned to Korea, or what is now the Republic of Korea.

Events at the Korean Legation

The Old Korean Legation property is important for its association with Korean-American relations and, more broadly, to global affairs, but it holds significance for Korean diasporic history generally and the history of Koreans in the Washington, D.C. area.



*Staff of the Korean Legation at Mount Vernon, May 6, 1889.
Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of of George Washington at Mount Vernon.*

³⁴ Mansfield, 73-74.

³⁵ District of Columbia Land Records, Deed Book 3358, 94.

³⁶ District of Columbia Land Records, Deed Book 3358, 92.

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The legation and its occupants were a source of great interest to Washingtonians, who watched the comings and goings and the social events. For several months in 1900, for instance, the building hosted Prince Uihwa, the second son of King Gojong, prior to his college attendance in Virginia.³⁷

The Puritan, “a journal for gentlewomen,” described a vexing curiosity of the public:

When the legation was first established its doors were besieged, day after day, by applicants for admission. Many of the visitors seemed to be laboring under the impression that these good people from the Hermit Nation were on a level with monkeys—monkeys enticed over here by generous Uncle Sam for the express purpose of amusing the class who find leisure a luxury thrust upon them.³⁸

The writer expresses a cosmopolitan attitude circulating among educated, upper-class society during the end of the century. It may have provided a softer landing for some international visitors and residents. The press described acting minister Yi and his wife as sociable, entertaining, and regularly interacting with Americans through their attendance of services at the Church of the Covenant at Connecticut Avenue and N Street NW. Yi was fluent in English and had first come to D.C. as a translator with the first permanent mission. The papers complimented Lady Yi’s “elegant hanboks, her classy but friendly manner, and her outgoing personality.”³⁹ Her pregnancy, too, was news. Her child was born on October 12, 1890 and christened at the Church of the Covenant. He was the first Korean American by nativity, named “Washon” (Hwa-son, 화손) for the city in which he was born. Sadly, he only lived two months and was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Georgetown in a plot secured by Sevellon A. Brown, son-in-law of Seth Phelps, the previous owner of the legation building.⁴⁰ Washingtonians mourned with the Yis.



Above: Headstone of infant Yi Hwa-son. From Old Korean Legation in Washington D.C.: The Symbol of Diplomatic Sovereignty and Korea-US Friendship.

³⁷ “Royal College Student,” *The Washington Post*, September 30, 1901.

³⁸ Catherine Frances Cavanagh, “The Corean Legation,” *The Puritan*, November 1897, 38.

³⁹ “Corean Minister Going,” *The New York Daily Tribune*, February 4, 1900.

⁴⁰ Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation, *Old Korean Legation in Washington D.C.: The Symbol of Diplomatic Sovereignty and Korea-US Friendship* (2019), 60-61.

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The Korean Legation performed essential consular functions supporting Koreans in the United States. Helping young Koreans who wanted to learn Western systems and technologies was a priority. The legation provided financial support to university students to study in the United States. Park Jeong-yang, the first minister, financed the tuition and living expenses studies of Yi Gye-pil (a.k.a. Ye Kay Pill and E.K. Field) in Philadelphia and at the George Washington University.⁴¹ In 1896, at least seven Korean students were enrolled at Howard University through the intervention of, and some funding from, Seo Gwang Beom during his short tenure as minister.⁴² The students had been studying in Japan, but decided to make their way instead to the United States. When stranded without funds in Canada, they appealed to the legation for assistance. As late as 1908, publications of the university would claim Koreans among its international student body.⁴³ The legation took on George Washington University president and attorney Dr. Charles W. Needham as “official chaperon” or protocol officer in 1901.⁴⁴

The legation soon assumed a broader role in education, finding a welcoming university “home” in Salem, Virginia. The fourth minister, Yi Chae-yeon (Ye Cha Yun), and Julius J. Dreher, the third president of Roanoke College, embarked on an enduring international program for Korean students. The men first met at the Korean Legation in March 1892, before Mr. and Mrs. Yi visited Roanoke for a week to assess its curriculum and accommodations.⁴⁵ Since the first student Seo Byung-kyu (Surh Beung Kiu) registered in 1894, it is said that 34 Korean students attended Roanoke, with nine graduating from the 1890s to the 1930s.⁴⁶ Those included Prince Uihwa; Kim Gyu-sik (Kimm Kiusic), later a renowned Korean independence movement activist; and Yi Gi-jong (Ye Ke Chong), the first son of ninth Minister Yi Beon-jin (Ye Pom Chin). As young, Western-educated elites, many of the graduates contributed to Korea’s modernization and to the independence movement during the Japanese occupation. Seo Byung-kyu, the first graduate, worked summers at the legation.⁴⁷ He held a membership in the new National Geographic Society and assisted Smithsonian curators labeling Korean collections in the late 1890s. He penned several articles about Korean history and culture for the *Roanoke Collegian*, and the Smithsonian’s Walter Hough acknowledged him as the key informant for his article “Korean Clan Organization,” published in *American Anthropologist* in 1899.⁴⁸ The Korean ministers regularly attended Roanoke College commencement ceremonies.⁴⁹ In 1897, Minister Seo Gwang-beom was

⁴¹ 박정양(Park Jeong-yang), *미행일기*(美行日記/Mihaengilgi/Journals on Trip to the US), manuscript, after 1889.

⁴² “Seven Koreans at Howard,” *The Washington Post*, May 8, 1896, 2.

⁴³ Dr. Robert Provine’s notes of his survey of Howard University catalogs 1896 through 1904 definitively show enrollment to at least 1900. “Howard’s Influence Universal,” *The Washington Bee*, June 13, 1908.

⁴⁴ “Diplomatic Pilots,” *The Evening Star*, March 11, 1905.

⁴⁵ J. Dreher, “Koreans in America,” *The Boston Evening Transcript*, March 26, 1904.

⁴⁶ William Edward Eisenberg, *The First Hundred Years, An Authentic History of Roanoke College, 1842-1942* (Salem, Virginia: Roanoke College, 1942), 214-217; Stella Xu, “The Grassroot Diplomacy between US and Korea during the 1890s – the Korean Legation and Roanoke College”, Lecture November 4, 2023, <https://www.roanoke.edu/koreanlegationmuseum>.

⁴⁷ *The Roanoke Collegian*, Vol. 20, No. 8 (June 1894), 65.

⁴⁸ “The following information concerning the Korean family or survival of the clan was elicited during several conversations with an intelligent Korean, Mr. Kiu Beung Surh, who is receiving his education in the United States.” Walter Hough, “Korean Clan Organization,” *American Anthropologist* 1 (1899), 150.

⁴⁹ Five ministers attended graduations: Park Yong-gyu, Suh Gwang-beom, Yi Beom-jin, Yi Eui-dam, and Cho Min-hui.

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presented an honorary master of arts degree.⁵⁰ Alumni remember the Korean graduates, particularly commemorating with a historic marker independence activist Kim Kyu-sik, founder of the Korean National Revolutionary Party.⁵¹



Jong Sik Ahn, He Chul Ye, Kwe P. Im, Bum Soo Ye, Biung H. Yur, Seek H. Kim, Nansa Kim (aka Nansa Ha), students at Howard University, 1896-1897. Howard University Archives.

Perhaps most important is the legation's connections to many important figures of Korea's modern era and to individuals prominent in the Korean American community.

Seo Gwang-beom⁵² (1859-1897) came to the District of Columbia in 1883 as a secretary with the first Korean diplomatic mission. In December 1884, after participating in the unsuccessful Gapsin Coup, he was forced into exile, making his way back to America with his coup comrades Philip Jaisohn and Park Yong-hyo.⁵³ Struggling to make a living, he applied for U.S. citizenship in 1889,

⁵⁰ Julius Daniel Drescher, "Koreans in America," *Roanoke Collegian*, March 26, 1904.

⁵¹ "Historical marker to Korean independence leader dedicated at Roanoke College," *The Cardinal News*, March 31, 2022.

⁵² Also Romanized as Soh Kwang-pom, Suh Kwang Beom, So Kwang Bom, So Kwangbom, Suh Kwang-pom, and So Koang Pom. He also went by an adopted Americanized name, Kennedy or Kenneth Soh.

⁵³ *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 19, 1885.

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receiving it three years later. He worked at the U.S. government's Office of Vital Statistics, then supported himself for a decade as a translator for Smithsonian ethnology curators and as a clerk, translator, and interpreter at the Bureau of Education. At the invitation of the U.S. Commissioner of Education W.T. Harris, Seo wrote an article "Education in Korea" that was included in an 1891 report to Congress. In the mid-1890s, he assisted Forster H. Jennings with an article about the Smithsonian's Korean headdresses and wrote a preface to Jennings's compilation of Confucian maxims.⁵⁴ Seo also wrote several short stories for *The Path*, the magazine of the Blavatsky Theosophical Society in D.C. In 1896, just after he was relieved of his Korean Legation duties in D.C., he appears to have played a key role in coordinating the wax-cylinder recording of Korean songs performed by at least two Korean students enrolled at Howard University and possibly himself. Recorded by anthropologist Alice C. Fletcher at her Capitol Hill home, the session was likely organized at the request of Anna Tolman Smith of the U.S. Office of Education, who published an article on Korean nursery rhymes, including the songs recorded by Fletcher, in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1897.⁵⁵ These wax cylinders are the oldest known recordings of Korean music and are archived at the Library of Congress.⁵⁶ In late 1892, Seo became a U.S. citizen. After being pardoned for his role in the Gapsin Coup, he returned to Korea for a brief appointment as minister of justice. A pro-Japanese faction fell out of favor after the assassination of Queen Min (Empress Myeongseong), and Seo was appointed minister to the U.S. Serving only January to June 1896, he was unseated by another turn of political fortunes back home. During his short tenure, he assisted a group of at least seven Korean students enroll at Howard University.⁵⁷ He was appointed president of the king's privy council in 1897, but ill health kept him from leaving his 14th Street home for Korea. He died August 18, 1897.⁵⁸

Seo Jae-Pil or Philip Jaisohn (1864-1951) is notable as the first Korean immigrant to become a naturalized U.S. citizen (in 1890) and the only Korean to be represented in a monument in Washington, erected for his contributions to the independence movement.⁵⁹ He also came to Washington in the 1880s after participating in the Gapsin Coup. In 1892, he earned his medical degree at Columbian Medical College, the first Korean immigrant to receive such a degree from an American institution. In 1894, he married Muriel Armstrong of Washington, D.C., a niece of former president of the United States James Buchanan. Theirs was probably the first interracial marriage involving a Korean immigrant in the U.S. His medical practice suffering, Jaisohn and his

⁵⁴ Forster H. Jennings, attaché of the Korean Legation compiled *The Proverbial Philosophy of Confucius: Quotations from the Chinese Classics for each Day in the Year*, a volume published in 1896.

⁵⁵ Anna Tolman Smith, "Some Nursery Rhymes of Korea," *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 10, No. 38 (July-September 1897), 181-186.

⁵⁶ Dr. Robert Provine, University of Maryland emeritus professor of ethnomusicology has done extensive research on the recordings and generously shared his notes and resources, which include his compilation of primary and secondary sources related to Suh Kwang Pom and the Howard University students. Provine has compiled this research into a presentation, "Revolutionaries, Nursery Rhymes, and Edison Wax Cylinders: The Remarkable Tale of the Earliest Korean Sound Recordings." It is published as "The Earliest Recordings of Korean Music (1896)," in Jidong Yang, ed., *Beyond the Book: Unique and Rare Primary Sources for East Asian Studies Collected in North America*, (New York: Columbia University Press/Association for Asian Studies, 2022).

⁵⁷ "Seven Koreans at Howard," *The Washington Post*, May 8, 1896; *D.C. Asian American Context Statement*, the 1882 Foundation for the D.C. Preservation League and the D.C. Office of Planning, draft 2024.

⁵⁸ "Pom Kwang Soh Dead," *The Sun*, August 14, 1897.

⁵⁹ The monument is located at 2320 Massachusetts Avenue NW, the consulate of the Republic of Korea.

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wife sheltered in the third-floor living quarters of the legation for several months prior to his return to Korea in late 1895.⁶⁰ There, Jaisohn published a liberal newspaper, *Tongnip Sinmun* (*The Independent*), until it the government tried to deport him. He returned to the U.S. in 1898 and settled permanently in Pennsylvania. Inspired by a massive March 1, 1919 demonstration in Seoul against Japanese rule, Jaisohn organized at Philadelphia the first overseas Korean independence movement.



Seo gwang-beom and Philip Jaisohn (back row, left to right) with Park Yong-hyo and Kim Ok-kyun in Japan after fleeing Korea following the failed Gapsin coup, early 1885. Photo from Channing Liem, America's Finest Gift to Korea: The Life of Philip Jaisohn.

Kim Hon-Sik, first secretary of the legation at the time of the 1905 closure, was still living in D.C. in the late 1920s. He had served as consul general under Seo Gwang-beom. "When the Korean legation was abolished in 1905, he [Kim] did not return to Korea, but became a permanent resident. He considered himself to be a national envoy without pay, without portfolio, even as he earned his living working at such menial jobs as kitchen helper, waiter, janitor, and actor; and every time a Korea-related question came up, he directly or indirectly offered his testimony to both houses of

⁶⁰ Young Chang Chae, *History of Korean-Americans in the Washington Metropolitan Area, 1883-1993*, translated by Kyu Won Lee (Annandale, VA: Korean Association of Greater Washington, 1995), 31. Chae names Pak Yong Gyu as the Legation staffer who helped Jaisohn.

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the U.S. Congress.”⁶¹ Stories such as this reinforce how relationships and experiences born of diplomatic endeavors contributed both to an independence movement largely organized from the United States, and to the early foundations of what would later develop into permanent Korean American communities.

Syngman Rhee (1875-1965), the future first president of the Republic of Korea, left his homeland for the U.S. in 1904, after serving a five-year prison sentence for involvement in a revolt to depose King Gojong. On his first day in Washington, he visited the Korean Legation and Rev. Teunis S. Hamlin, pastor of the Church of the Covenant. In August 1905, he joined P.K. Yoon, the representative of Koreans in Hawai‘i, to present Korea’s case to President Theodore Roosevelt, who was negotiating the Portsmouth Treaty to end the Russo-Japanese War. Rhee met first with the Korean Legation before seeking audience with members of Congress, cabinet members, and President Roosevelt himself.⁶² Supported by a ministerial scholarship, Rhee earned his undergraduate degree at the George Washington University and proceeded to a doctorate from Princeton. He spent most of the 1920s and 1930s working on raising support for Korean independence largely operating under the aegis of the Korean Commission from a D.C. office. On two occasions, the Commission tried to re-establish a Korean Legation in D.C., but it failed for lack of funds and the lack of recognition by other nations. Splitting much of his time between Washington and Hawai‘i, the relationships Rhee developed gave rise to institutions, especially churches, that persisted. In 1948, he was elected as president of South Korea.

The Legation as symbol and as a home again

For a time, the shuttered legation was a rallying point for the independence movement in exile, representing the hope that it would one day represent a free Korea. Postcards were produced depicting the legation building flying a drawn-in Korean flag (*Taegeukgi*), a symbol of defiance. These were reportedly circulated among the diaspora as an assertion of an enduring national identity. Koreans protested the 1910 offering of the property for sale, trying to block a purchase with bad publicity: “Don’t buy Korean legation house... from Japanese, because it is Korean property and Koreans in America are anxious to keep it until the Japanese are routed from Korea.”⁶³ Henry Chung DeYoung (Jeong Han-gyeong, 1890-1985) was in D.C. during this era—studying for his doctorate in international jurisprudence as well as working for the pro-independence Korean Commission. Among a collection of his photographs is an image of the legation building with the hand-typed inscription, “Former Korean Legation, Washington.” Most likely taken between 1919 and 1922, it suggests how the building continued to be a landmark for the diaspora even a decade after its closure.⁶⁴

As suggested by the chain of title, the legation building reverted to residential use, beginning as the home of Horace Fulton, who undertook alterations and repairs. By 1943, the property was

⁶¹ *The Writings of Henry Cu Kim: Autobiography with Commentaries on Syngman Rhee, Pak Yong-man, and Chong Sun-man*, Dae-Sook Suh, editor. Honolulu: Center for Korean Studies, University of Hawaii, 1987, 123-124.

⁶² Lew Yŏng-ik Lew, *The Making of the First Korean President: Syngman Rhee’s Quest for Independence, 1875-1948* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2017).

⁶³ “Sale Of Legation Is Opposed By Koreans,” *The Evening Star*, September 30, 1910.

⁶⁴ 1882 Foundation, *D.C. Asian American Context Statement*.

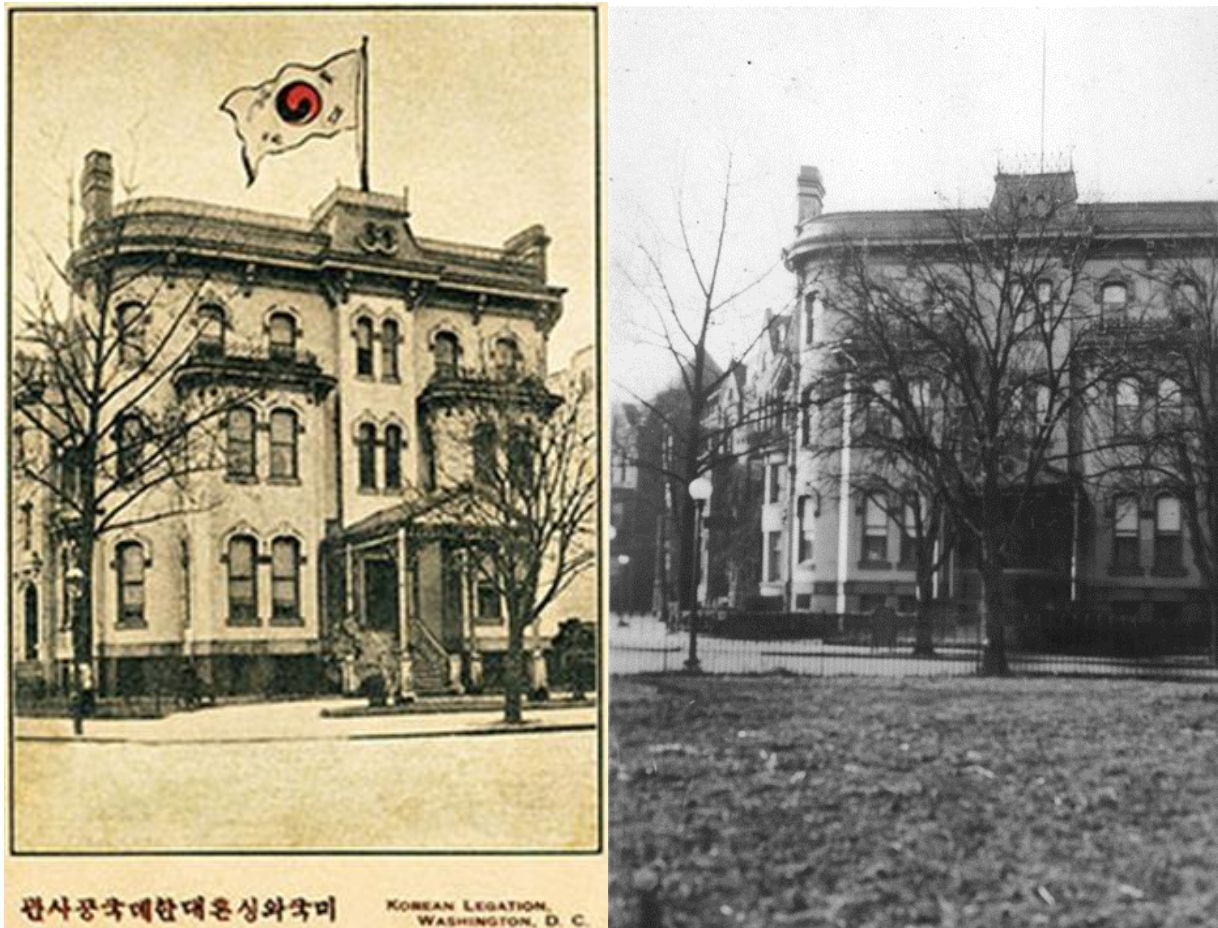
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headquarters for Local 639 of the Teamsters Union.⁶⁵ It was later an office of the National Council of Negro Women.⁶⁶ Returning to residential use in 1977—with proceeds of the sale to benefit the Logan Circle Community Association—it was finally purchased October 18, 2012 by the Republic of Korea, with the intention of creating a museum to commemorate the country's legation.⁶⁷



Left: An undated postcard that could be no earlier than 1909 carrying a new year's greeting between two members of the Korean National Association in exile. The Korean flag has been added to an earlier photo of the former legation, which had been shuttered more than three years earlier. Collection of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History.

Right: A Henry Chung DeYoung scrapbook photo of the Korean Legation building circa 1920. Korean American Digital Archives, University of Southern California Libraries.

⁶⁵ "Union Denied Right To Occupy Property At 1500 13th Street," *The Evening Star*, March 24, 1945.

⁶⁶ Andy Leon Harvey, "The Color and Character of Victorian Design," *The Washington Star*, January 8, 1978. The property was known as 15 Logan Circle during the tenancy of the National Council of Negro Women, and the address still appears in property tax assessments.

⁶⁷ "Elegant Restoration," *The Washington Star*, October 17, 1976.

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Chain of Title for 1500 13 th Street NW			
Date	Liber, Folio/Doc#	Grantor	Grantee
October 18, 2012	Liber OPR, Doc # 2012112987	Lauretta C. Jenkins and Timothy L. Jenkins	Republic of Korea
September 19, 1977	Doc # 7700029965	Robert S. Pace	Lauretta C. Jenkins and Timothy L. Jenkins
July 17, 1964	Liber 12246, Folio 338	Evelyn H. Letcher and Henry M. Letcher	Robert S. Pace
January 23, 1959	Liber 11180, Folio 533	Charles J. Bell	Evelyn H. Letcher and Henry M. Letcher
“ ”	Liber 11180, Folio 529	Lawrence J. Mills Jr./Martin F. Donoghue/ Elsie L. Leishear	Charles J. Bell
August 20, 1956	Liber 10720, Folio 588	George and Sophia Basiliko	Doris and Earl Towles
“ ”	Liber 10720, Folio 586	Elsie L. Leishear	George and Sophia Basiliko
“ ”	Liber 10720, Folio 580	Elsie L. Leishear	Lawrence J. Mills Jr./Martin F. Donoghue
“ ”	Liber 10720, Folio 573	Charles J. Bell	Elsie L. Leishear
September 1, 1910	Liber 3358, Folio 94	Baron Yasuya Uchida	Horace K. Fulton
“ ”	Liber 3358, Folio 92	“His Majesty the present King of Chosun Ye”	Baron Yasuya Uchida
December 1, 1891	Liber 1617, Folio 495	Sevellon A. Brown/ Trustee	“His Majesty the present King of Chosun Ye”
October 22, 1873	Liber 735, Folio 170	William H. C. Bayly	Seth Ledyard Phelps

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☒ previously listed in the National Register (as a contributing resource)
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

☐ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☒ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other
Name of repository: National Register of Historic Places

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.06 acre (2,434 square feet)

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☒ NAD 1983

1. Zone: 18S

Easting: 324001.242

Northing: 4308790.414

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Verbal Boundary Description

The Old Korean Legation occupies Lot 74 of Square 241. The lot is bounded by 13th Street NW on the east; Logan Circle Northwest on the south; Lot 73, Square 241 on the north; and Lot 843, Square 241, on the west. The boundaries also include those aspects of the building (projecting bays) that project beyond the building lot and extend into public space.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries are the original boundaries of the lot (74) upon which the building was constructed in 1877, and occupied as the Korean Legation from 1889-1905.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Emma Lucier-Keller

organization: The 1882 Foundation

street & number: 508 I Street NW

city or town: Washington state: DC zip code: 20001

e-mail: ted@1882foundation.org

telephone: _____

date: October 14, 2023

Additional Documentation

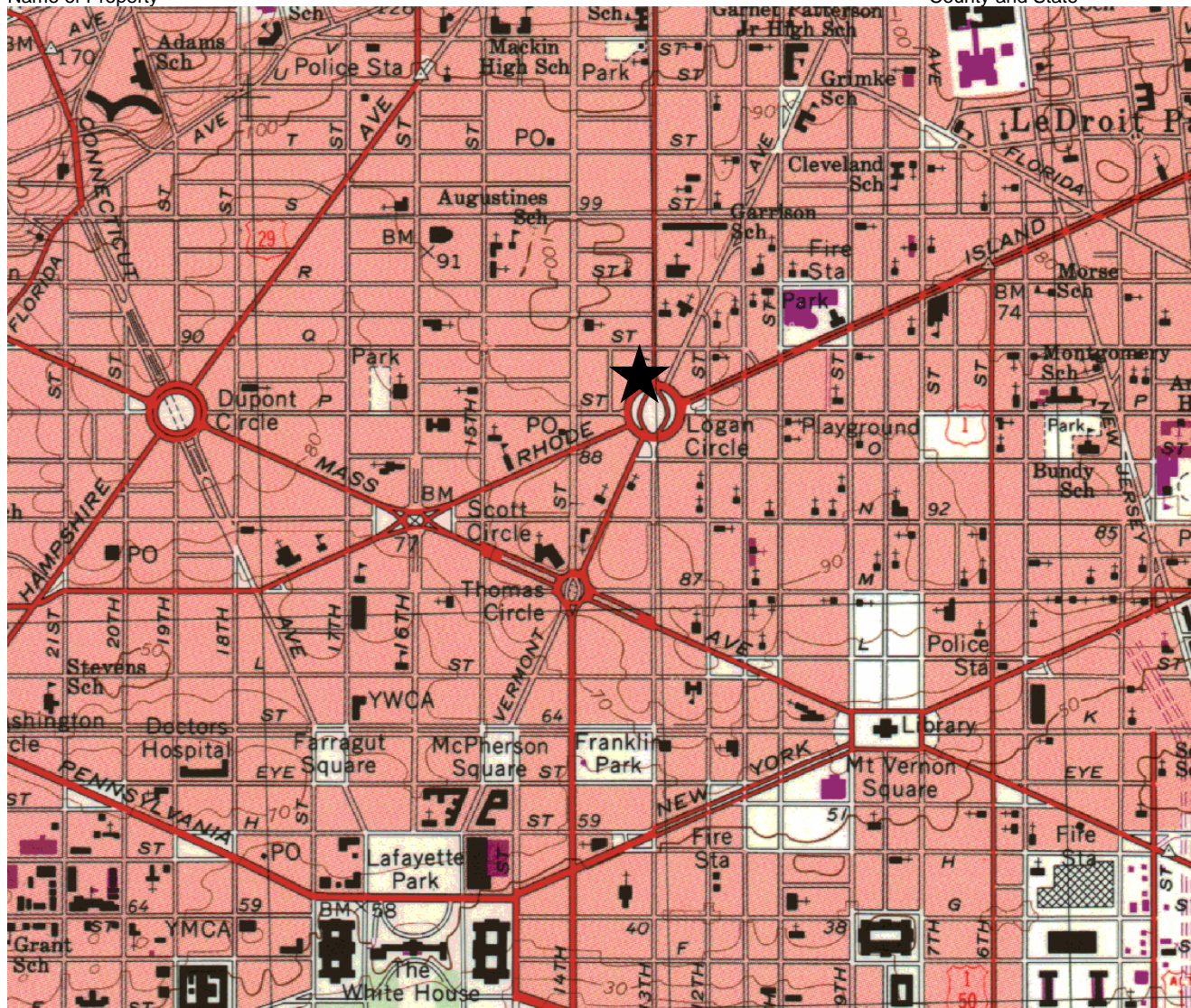
Maps:

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Locational Map showing Old Korean Legation at 1500 13th Street NW
(USGS Topographic Map, Washington West Quadrangle)

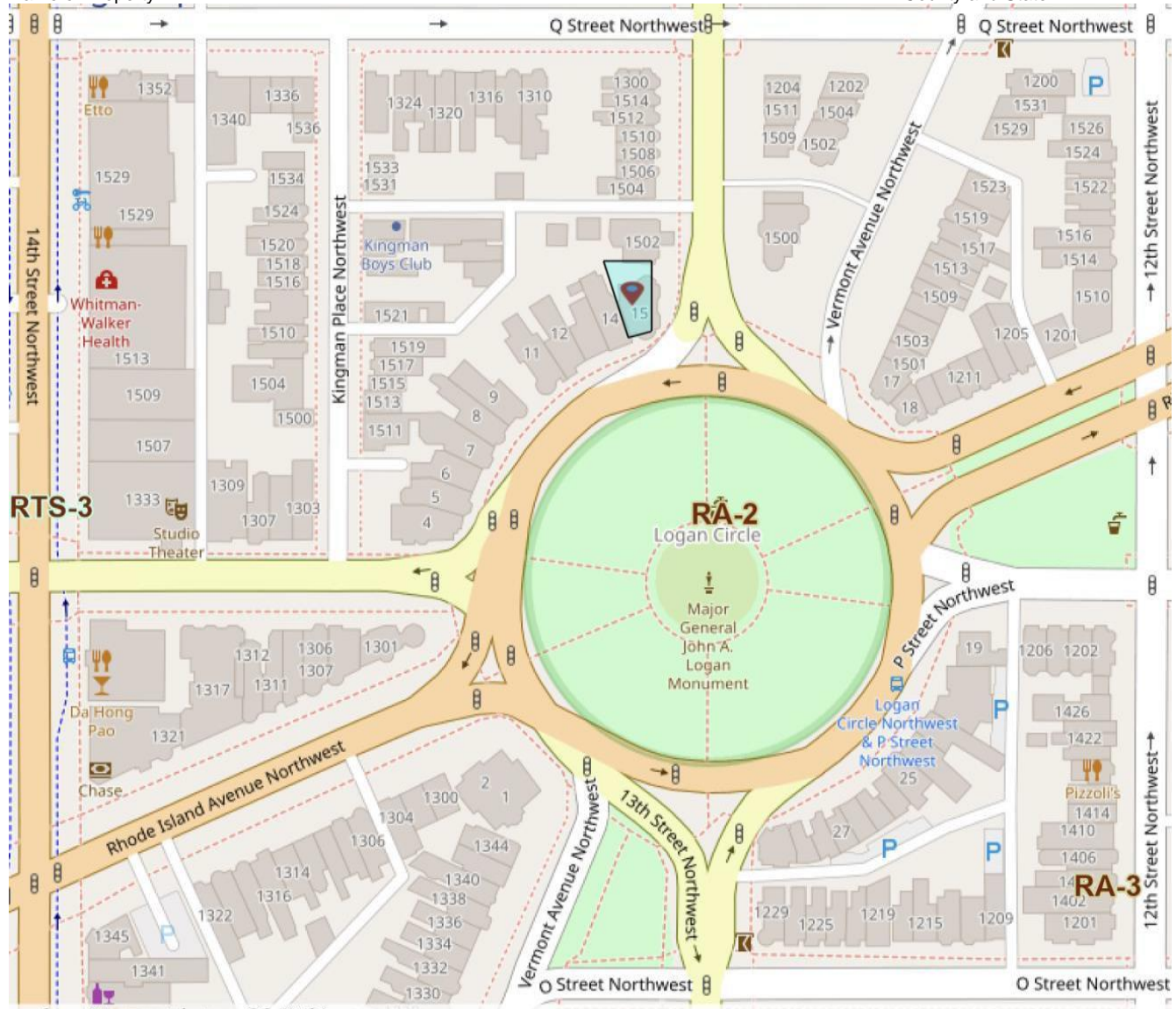
UTM Zone: 18S Easting: 324001.242 Northing: 4308790.414

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Site Map showing location of Old Korean Legation at 1500 13th Street NW
(District of Columbia zoning map)

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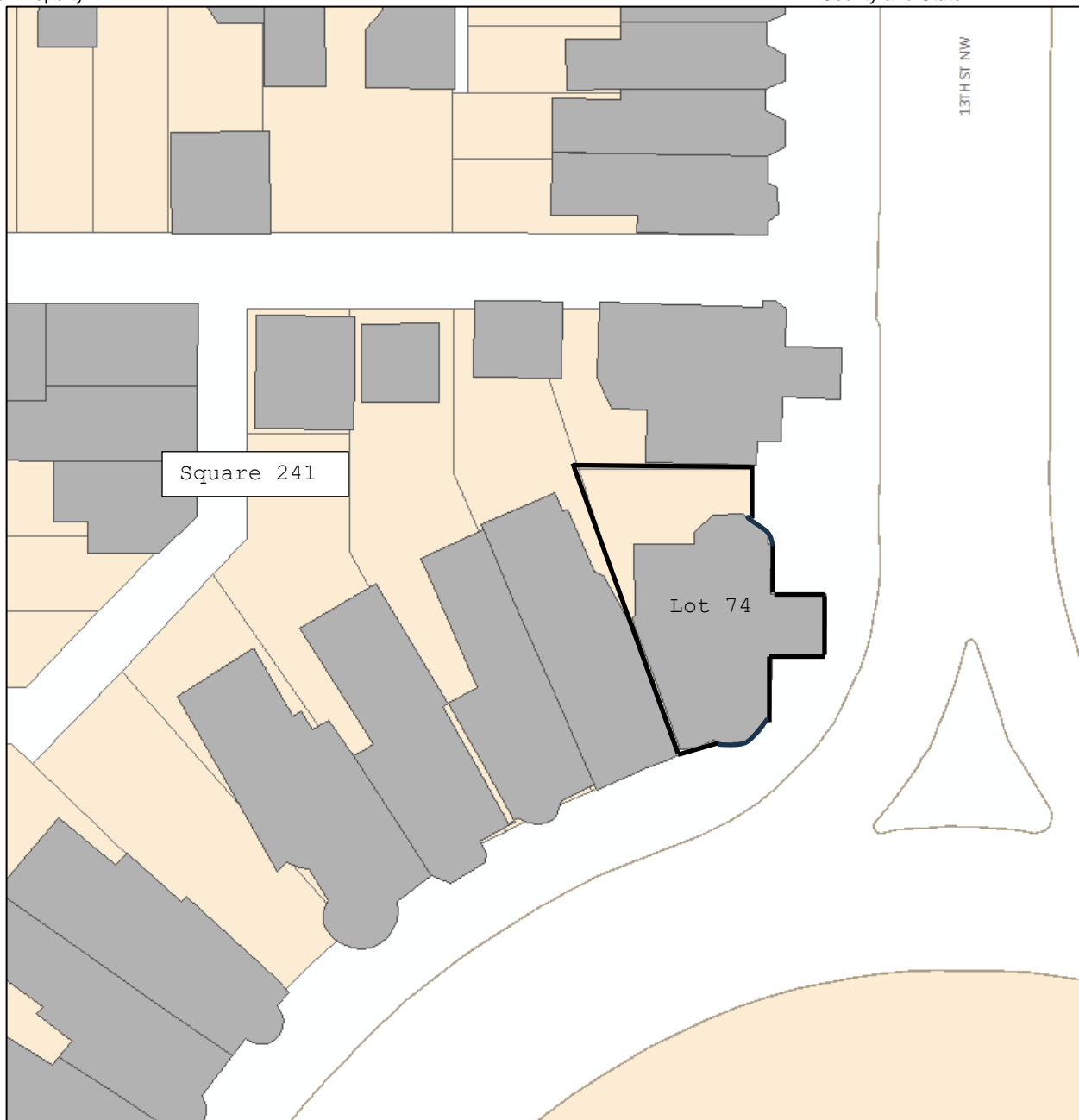
Aerial View of Logan Circle area showing location of the Old Korean Legation
at 1500 13th Street NW circled in red
(DC Office of the Chief Technology Officer, Ortho Photo, 2019)

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Boundary Map showing National Register boundaries of Old Korean Legation. The boundaries include Lot 0074 in Square 241 as well as all building elements that project beyond the lot lines into public space.

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First Floor Plan

Old Korean Legation

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Second floor Plan

Old Korean Legation
Name of Property

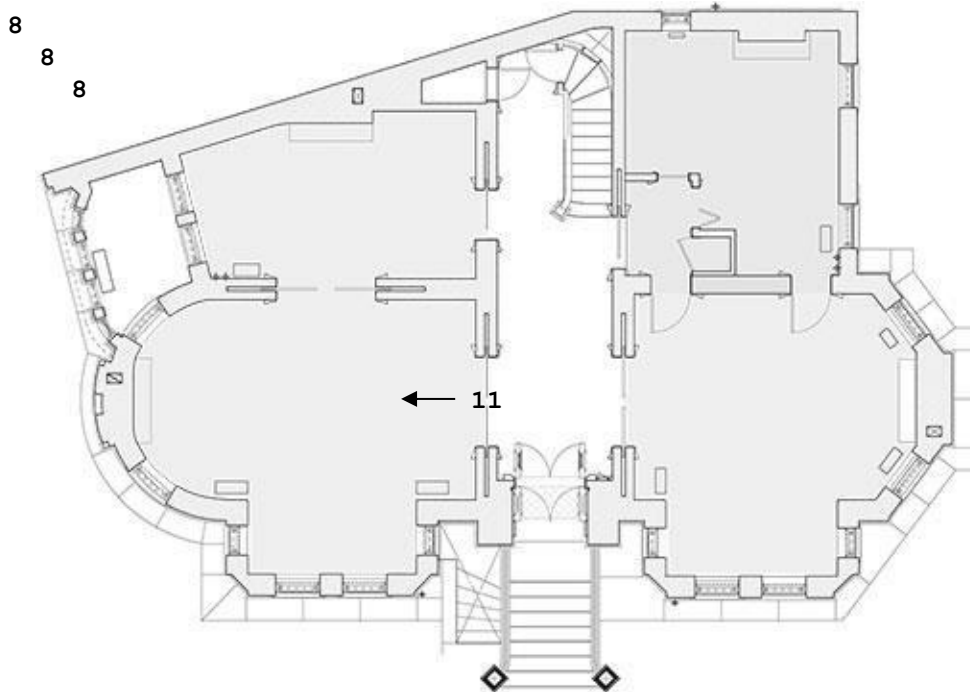
Washington, DC
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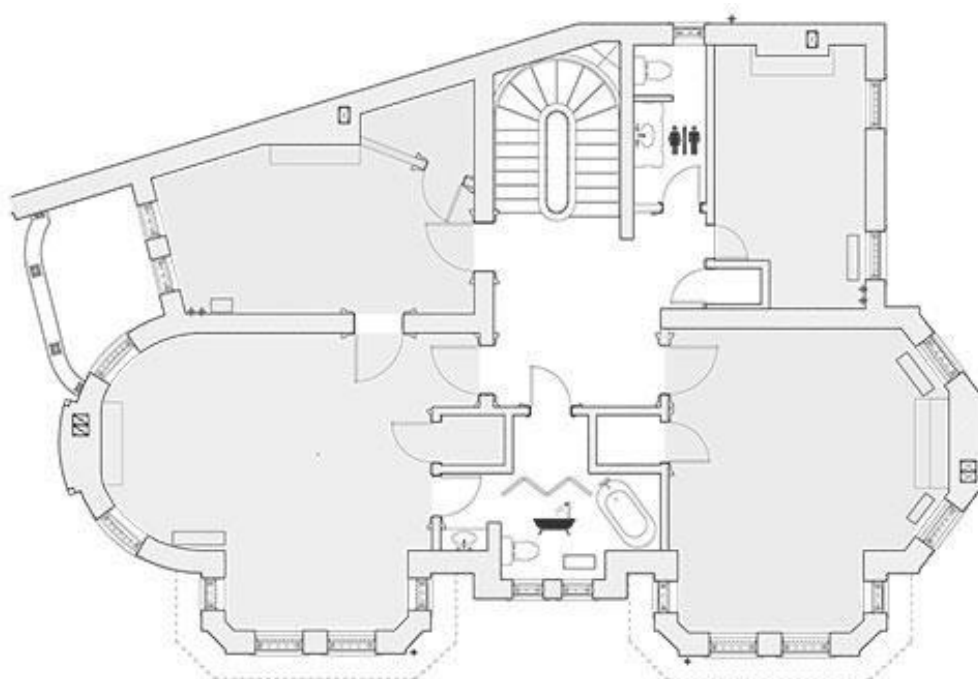
Key to Photographs

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First Floor



Second Floor

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Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Old Korean Legation

City or Vicinity: Washington

County: N/A State: D.C.

Photographer: Kim Prothro Williams

Date Photographed: March 2024

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 21	View looking northwest showing the house in its Logan Circle context
2 of 21	View looking west showing east façade
3 of 21	View looking north showing south and east elevations with 14 Logan Circle to left
4 of 21	View looking northwest showing south and east elevations
5 of 21	View looking north showing south elevation obliquely
6 of 21	View looking skyward showing chimney stack on south elevation
7 of 21	View looking west showing central entry tower on east elevation
8 of 21	View looking west showing north elevation obliquely
9 of 20	View looking south showing porte-cochère
10 of 21	View looking west showing front entry door on east façade
11 of 21	Interior view looking south into the first floor front parlor, or <i>gaekdang</i> , from stair hall
12 of 21	Interior view looking north into the first floor dining room, or <i>sikdang</i> , from the stair hall.
13 of 21	Interior view looking east from the stair to front entry door

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14 of 21	Interior view looking west at mantel in the back parlor, or jeongdang, from the door leading into the room from the stair hall.
15 of 21	Interior view looking south into the <i>jeongdang</i> towards the enclosed porch opening off of it on the south exterior elevation.
16 of 21	Interior view looking south in the service area showing the stair hall wall with ghosting indicating location of servant stair, revealed during the 2015-2018 renovation.
17 of 21	Interior view looking south into the historic Bedroom of the Minister towards the rounded bay on the south side facing Logan Circle.
18 of 21	Interior view looking north from the bedroom towards the en suite bathroom and doors to the stair hall and Office of the Minister.
19 of 21	Interior view of the third floor exhibition space
20 of 21	Interior view looking west up the stair from stair landing
21 of 21	Interior view looking west at the stair showing the Eastlake newel post

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Photo 1

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Photo 2

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Photo 3

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Photo 4

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Photo 5

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Photo 6

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Photo 7

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Photo 8

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Photo 9

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Photo 10

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Photo 11

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Photo 12

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Photo 13

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Photo 14

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Photo 15

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Photo 16

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Photo 17

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Photo 18

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Photo 19

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Photo 20

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Photo 21

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