

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
Please summarize any amendment(s)

Property Name: Old Chinese Legation
If any part of the interior is being nominated, it must be specifically identified and described in the narrative statements.

Address: 2001 19th Street NW, Washington, DC 20009

Square and lot number(s): Square 2555, Lot 0045

Affected Advisory Neighborhood Commission: ANC 1C

Date of Construction: 1902 Date of major alteration(s):

Architect(s): Waddy B. Wood Architectural style(s): Elizabethan/Jacobean Revival

Original use: GOVERNMENT/diplomatic building Present use: DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling

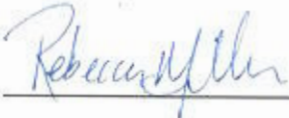
Property owner: The Chinese Embassy Condo
Legal address of property owner: 2001 19th Street NW

NAME OF APPLICANT(S): DC Preservation League; The Chinese Embassy Condo

If the applicant is an organization, it must submit evidence that among its purposes is the promotion of historic preservation in the District of Columbia. A copy of its charter, articles of incorporation, or by-laws, setting forth such purpose, will satisfy this requirement.

Address/Telephone of applicant(s): DC Preservation League, 641 S Street NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20001, (202) 783-5144

Name and title of authorized representative: Rebecca Miller, Executive Director, DC Preservation League

Signature of applicant representative:  Date: 1/18/2024

Address/Telephone of applicant(s): 2001 19th St. NW ~~DAE~~ 202-590.2500

Name and title of authorized representative: PAULA M. COHEN, secretary

Signature of applicant representative: Paula M. Cohen Date: 22 Jan. 24

Name and telephone of author of application: DC Preservation League, (202) 783-5144

Date received _____
H.P.O. staff _____

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Old Chinese Legation

Other names/site number: Chinese Embassy Condominium

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

2. Location

Street & number: 2001 19th Street NW

City or town: Washington State: 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 ___ 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 ___ 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 ___ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___A ___B ___C ___D

<hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
<hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> Signature of commenting official:	Date
<hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> 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

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- 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>0</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

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

GOVERNMENT/diplomatic building

Current Functions

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

Elizabethan/Jacobean Revival

Materials:

Principal exterior materials of the property: brick, limestone, terracotta

Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

The Old Chinese Legation building is a large, three-story brick, limestone, and terra cotta mansion designed by noted D.C. architect Waddy B. Wood. The building is approximately 62 feet wide and 80 feet deep and is located on the northeast corner of 19th Street and Vernon Street NW. It is an imposing structure, designed in the Elizabethan/Jacobean Revival style with elaborate limestone ornamentation appropriate for an embassy seeking to project an image of dignity and sophistication. It served as the Imperial Chinese Legation from 1903 to 1912, as the Legation of the Republic of China from 1912 to 1935, and as the Embassy of the Republic of China from 1935 to 1943. Currently a residential condominium, the building occupies Lot 45 in Square 2555 and is a structure contributing to the character of the Register-listed Washington Heights Historic District. It retains a high degree of historic integrity.

Narrative Description

The Old Chinese Legation building is a large, three-story brick mansion designed by noted D.C. architect Waddy B. Wood in an eclectic Elizabethan/Jacobean Revival style typical of early twentieth-century residential architecture. The house is located at the northeast corner of Vernon Street and 19th Street NW in the Washington Heights section of Washington, D.C. One of the earliest buildings in this neighborhood, the house is freestanding on a large corner lot. Subsequent construction in the immediate area has been primarily rowhouses. The lot slopes gently toward the southwest; a low, stone retaining wall at the corner appears to be original to the house's construction, based on an historic photo (Photo 1). A shallow paved driveway provides access to the main entrance of the residence.

The façade (southern elevation) is three-stories of Flemish-bond brick, approximately 62 feet wide, with symmetrical limestone porches on either side of the main block (Photo 3). The steeply gabled roof features parapeted, symmetrically paired gables that rise above two-story bays. Each of the

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two bays is surmounted by a balcony with a neoclassical balustrade and has three windows on each level. The one-over-one double-hung sash windows are surmounted by transoms, each divided into twelve small square lights. The windows have tabbed limestone surrounds typical of Elizabethan/Jacobean styling. At the third level, doorways provide access to the balconies, each flanked by double-hung sash windows and surmounted by transoms. The transoms on the western bay have diamond lights, while those on the eastern bay have square lights. It is unknown why the house's transoms have two different styles of lights. It is also unknown whether these are all original. Photo 1 shows that at least some of the original transoms featured square lights. The door/window ensembles have tabbed limestone surrounds that match the window surrounds below. Above each is a small, vented window. An elaborate ornamental limestone parapet tops each gable (Photo 8).

At ground level, a large limestone belt course runs around the front and side elevations with recessed basement windows in the bays and flanking the main entrance. The entrance features an elaborate and imposing tabbed terracotta surround and is approached via a two-step stone pedestal (Photos 6 and 7). The doorway is surmounted by a fanlight transom, a neoclassical frieze, and a heavy broken neoclassical pediment. It is flanked by rusticated pilasters from which hang metal lanterns. It is not known whether the lanterns are original. Above the doorway and connected to it by limestone ashlar is a tripartite window, framed by a tabbed limestone surround. The window is made up of three one-over-one double-hung windows with decorative transoms containing diamond lights. Above a string course that connects to the balustrades surmounting the two bays, the asphalt-shingled cross gabled roof is exposed. The original roof, which was reported to be "sea green" in color, was presumably finished in slate and is now clad in dark gray asphalt-composite shingles. At the center, directly above the entrance, is a small half-timbered dormer, framed with vergeboards.¹

The western elevation, facing 19th Street NW, is approximately 80 feet long and asymmetrically composed (Photo 10). The rear (northern) half of the elevation appears to be an independent, less ornate structure attached to the back of the house. This is an intentional part of Waddy Wood's design that separates the office/chancery section at the rear of the building from the ambassador's residence at the front. The dominant feature at the southwest corner of the building is the limestone enclosed porch, which matches a porch at the opposite (southeast) corner (Photo 9). The porch is two bays wide and dominated by large round-arched windows with many subdivisions. The central section of each is bipartite, with six lights in each section, surmounted by a plain fanlight. This central section is surrounded by additional lights, including narrow flanking sections of three lights each and arched segments surrounding the central fanlight. Each window section is enclosed by a keystone neoclassical limestone arch. The porch is topped by a neoclassical cornice and balustraded balcony. The two window bays on the west elevation are matched by one on the south, forming the rectangular porch.

The balcony above the porch, bounded by a neoclassical balustrade, is fronted by two window sets. The window set on the west side is made up of three one-over-one double-hung windows with decorative transoms that match the windows on the bays of the main façade, each being

¹ "China's New Temple of Hospitality in America," *Washington Times*, Jan. 3, 1904, 7.

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divided into six small square lights. The window set facing south is composed of two one-over-one double-hung windows with transoms composed of diamond lights matching those of the central window of the main façade. Above the roofline on the west elevation is another small half-timbered frame dormer, framed with vergeboards that matches the one above the main entrance. Opposite this dormer, facing south, is a larger, brick-faced dormer surmounted by a large, round arched brick pediment with an ornamental terracotta or limestone pediment. The window is a twelve-over-one double hung sash. Below the window is an ornamental faux iron balcony.

Four tall brick chimneys with limestone bands and ornamental covers rise from points on the roof where the two side gables of the house meet the central house block. The chimneys match, although the two chimneys most visible from the front are larger than the two toward the rear of the house.

The large protruding gabled section of the west elevation, adjacent to the limestone porch, includes a single-story limestone bay with four narrow windows, each surmounted by a small six-light transom (Photo 11). Above the bay at the second story is another tripartite window with a tabbed limestone surround. The window is composed of one-over-one double hung sashes surmounted by six-light transoms that match the other transoms on this side of the house. At the third story is a similar bipartite window with tabbed limestone surround and six-light transoms. A tiny vent with a limestone sill is centered above it. An ornamental limestone parapet tops the gable but features less ornamentation than the two gables on the main façade. The limestone belt course from the south elevation continues around the bottom of the gabled section of the west façade but does not continue past it to the north end of the building. The north side of the protruding west gable, which faces away from most visitors, includes a shed-roofed dormer.

The office/chancery section of the building extends the rest of the length (approximately one half) of the west elevation past the west gable (Photo 12). It appears recessed from the west gable and porch of the main building, conveying the feeling that it is meant to be less imposing and conspicuous. The lack of a limestone belt course or basement windows contributes to the feeling that this is at once an attached but separate building. This rear part of the structure has an overall less ornate appearance. Its three stories appear shorter than those of the main house block. At the roofline, three simple gabled dormers protrude from what reads as a cross gable, although this portion of the building actually has a mansard roof.

Echoing the composition of the main façade in a much-diminished format, the office addition portion of the west elevation features paired two-story limestone bays topped with balconies spanned by a central section that includes a simple entrance with a plain limestone lintel that spans two other windows, one narrow and divided into twelve square lights, matching the transoms elsewhere on the house, and another larger one-over-one sash window. The limestone bay at the north end features three simple one-over-one sash windows at each story, without transoms. The limestone bay at the south end matches the north bay, except that the windows on the first story are six-over-six sashes. Similarly, the second level of the central section features three one-over-one sash windows with simple limestone lintels. A limestone belt course runs above these three windows and across the two bays, forming the base of the solid stone balconies.

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The rear (north) elevation faces an alley (Photo 13). It is plain Flemish-bond brick with no articulation. The first floor features windows grouped or alone under plain limestone lintels. Above one group of four narrow windows, an arched pattern appears in the brickwork. This may indicate the original location of the “automobile house” that was a noted feature of the house. On the second and third stories, grouped pairs of one-over-one sash windows or single one-over-one sash windows are surmounted by plain stone lintels. Four small vent windows of varying sizes run across the attic level. Resident parking now occupies the shallow area between the building and the alley.

The east elevation roughly matches the west elevation but involves simpler design elements because this elevation is not as visible from the street (Photo 14). The front section, including the limestone porch and the features above it, matches the west elevation exactly. The protruding gabled section of the east elevation, however, lacks the limestone bay on the first floor found on the west side. Instead, two transomed windows with tabbed limestone surrounds are located at the first-floor level. The tripartite window at the second-floor level lacks the limestone surround and transoms found on the corresponding window on the west side. However, the bipartite third-floor window and the limestone parapeted gable match those on the west side.

The office-chancery section at the rear of the east elevation is similar to that of the west elevation but lacks some features and ornamentation. At the roofline, instead of three gabled dormers with single one-over-one windows, the east elevation features just two gabled dormers, which are larger and have bipartite windows. Like the west side, these dormers protrude from what reads as a cross gable, although this portion of the building actually has a mansard roof. At the first and second-story levels, the east elevation lacks the limestone bays found on the west side. At the second story, two tripartite windows with one-over-one sash and plain limestone lintels flank a similar single one-over-one window. On the ground floor, five transomed windows with plain stone lintels are spaced across the brick wall.

Visible from the rear of the building are steel girders mounted above the roof to support a modern roof deck that covers the rear portion of the building.

The *Washington Post* provided a detailed description of the layout.

The legation is entered by a large hall, with a great staircase at one side and a gallery, from which all rooms on the second floor enter, running around the hall. Over the hall is a handsome dome, extending for three stories to the roof, giving the effect of the building’s full height at once on entering. From the dome will be suspended a large lantern of Oriental design. On the right of the hall are two large rooms. The one at the rear is the dining-room, a very handsome apartment capable of seating about forty persons. It is finished in dull oak and tapestry. In front of this is a music room, and a glass inclosed porch, giving a view of the city from the dining-room and the music room as well. On this side of the hall is a stairway leading to a smoking room in the basement. This apartment is finished in mission style. On the left side and opposite the dining and music rooms is a large ball room. In front of the ballroom is a parlor and a conservatory. As on the opposite side of the house, the apartments are so arranged that

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a view of the city can be obtained from each of the three rooms, that from the ballroom being through the conservatory. The ball-room, which will be one of the handsomest in the city, is finished in white, yellow, silk, and pier glasses [mirrors]. A raised platform is to be placed in the bay for the use of the musicians. The parlor will be finished in Louis XIV style, with decorations in yellow.

Over the main part of the building will be the apartments for the minister, his family, and his guests. The servants' quarters will be in the basement. Back of the main stairs is practically a separate building, in which will be the legation offices, the attaches' quarters, and an automobile house.²

The interior has been twice remodeled comprehensively, first as an apartment house in the 1960s and later as condominiums in the 1980s. Few of the original interior features remain. The main foyer (Photos 17 and 18) no longer has an open skylit section in the center, nor is there a gallery at the second-floor level overlooking the central foyer. The foyer is divided by classical piers and beams into two main sections, with entrances on both side that lead to individual apartments. While the piers and beams may be original, little else is. The staircase at the rear of the foyer is likely in the same place as the original stair and may include some elements of the original. However, the balusters and handrail appear to be modern replacements. The upper floors have been subdivided into modern apartments that do not reflect the original room designs. One or more of the first-floor apartments may contain fireplace mantels that are original.

The exterior retains a high degree of historic integrity from the period of significance (1902 to 1943), including integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, and materials. Despite reportedly being vandalized in the early 1960s, the building has undergone very few exterior changes. The original "sea green" roof has been replaced with dark gray asphalt shingles. In addition, a raised rooftop deck has been added to the rear portion of the building. This deck is not visible from the street in front of the building. The extent to which windows have been replaced is unknown, although many are likely replacements. The current windows appear to generally match the look of the originals.

² "Real Estate Market," *Washington Post*, Dec. 21, 1902, 28.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

- 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

ARCHITECTURE
ETHNIC HERITAGE/ASIAN
POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

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Period of Significance

1902-1943

Significant Dates

1902-1903

1937

1943

Significant Person

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Waddy B. Wood, architect

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The Old Chinese Legation building achieves significance under District of Columbia Criterion B and similar National Register Criterion A for its association with historical periods, social movements and patterns of growth that contributed to the heritage and development of the District. Only the second purpose-built foreign legation building in the District of Columbia (the first was the old British Embassy on Connecticut Avenue), the Old Chinese Legation building is an excellent example of diplomatic architecture intended both to welcome and impress visitors. The building dates to the last years of the Qing dynasty of China, a time when the government was fighting foreign intervention while also opening to increased trade and technology from countries like the United States. The choice of a romantic revival architectural style based on Western rather than Chinese sources conveys the diplomatic stance of China in those days. The Chinese Legation became the base for Chinese diplomats to work with American officials on issues such as limitations on Chinese immigration to the United States, the protection of Chinese nationals in America, and American support for the Republic of China against foreign aggression. The building was the first to serve as the Chinese Embassy to the United States when China's diplomatic mission was elevated to embassy status in 1935.

The Old Chinese Legation is also significant under District of Columbia Criteria D through F and the related National Register Criterion C, because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, style, and method of construction. First, it is only the second purpose-built embassy building in the nation's capital, an important example of a building type peculiar to the city.

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Second, the building is an exceptional example of the Elizabethan/Jacobean Revival architectural style in Washington residential buildings of the early twentieth century. Prominently located on a strategic corner lot overlooking the city from what was then a very sparsely developed hillside, the building helped define the high level of architectural excellence that would become the standard for residences in the Kalorama and Washington Heights neighborhoods. The building was designed by master architect Waddy B. Wood to suit the desire of the Chinese minister who “preferred something American or adaptable to American home life rather than a building of the Chinese type.” The Elizabethan/Jacobean Revival style chosen by Wood fit the bill as a contemporary romantic revival style that evoked the English country homes to which many Americans felt nostalgically connected. Wood’s adaptation of the revival styles produced a mansion that struck an elegant balance between the imposing dignity of a diplomatic seat and the inviting warmth of a grand manor house.

The Old Chinese Legation building is remarkably intact and retains a high degree of integrity. It has generally been well maintained and preserves the original exterior features of design, workmanship, and materials that establish its architectural and historical significance. The building’s period of significance begins with its construction in 1902 and ends with the relocation of the Chinese embassy in 1943.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Chinese legations occupied several Washington mansions in the late nineteenth century before minister Wu Ting Fang won support from his government to build a custom-designed legation building in the Washington Heights neighborhood. China was only the second country to undertake such a project. The new legation was an important base for Chinese diplomatic efforts in the early twentieth century, spanning the transition from hereditary monarchy to republic and instrumental to the cementing of close ties between the United States and the Republic of China. The legation was raised to embassy status in 1935 and relocated in 1943.

The development of Washington Heights before 1902

Washington Heights was originally part of a large tract known as the “Widow’s Mite,” owned by Anthony Holmead, one of the original proprietors of the District of Columbia. Located north of Boundary Street, present-day Florida Avenue), the area was part of the former Washington County, a rural area dotted with farms and country houses. The nearest of the latter was “Oak Lawn,” built in the 1820s and expanded into a Second-Empire style mansion by Thomas P. Morgan in the 1870s. The Oak Lawn mansion, where the Washington Hilton stands today, had a commanding view of the city. The eastern border of Morgan’s estate was 19th Street, and very few structures were erected to the east of it until very late in the century (see Map 4).³

³ Laura Trieschmann, et al., Washington Heights Historic District *National Register* nomination, (Washington, DC, Jul. 2006), is the source for the background information on the neighborhood and provides extensive information on its history.

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The subdivision of the Kalorama and Washington Heights neighborhoods took place in the early 1880s. The arrival of electric streetcars in Washington in 1888 further accelerated the effort to develop new suburban communities across much of northwest Washington. The arrival of streetcar service along Florida Avenue in 1892 sparked development of lots immediately to the north. Residential construction in Washington Heights began in the 1890s and consisted mainly of speculative rows often built in groups for middle-class residents and their families. Although some of these houses were owner-occupied, most were rental units. Unlike the subdivisions in Kalorama, west of Columbia Road, only a few large, detached dwellings were erected for members of the upper class in Washington Heights. One of these exceptions was the Chinese Legation.⁴

The Chinese Legation's previous locations

China and the United States had first established diplomatic relations with the Treaty of Wangxia, signed by a U.S. envoy and a Chinese official in China in 1844. The U.S. began sending envoys to China, but it would be many years before permanent diplomatic missions were established. As the U.S. sought to improve trade with China and China worked to limit foreign interference in its internal affairs, the Burlingame Treaty, signed in 1868, established reciprocal rights of travel, residence, and study in the two nations. Eventually, China authorized a naturalized Chinese American, Yung Wing, to search for a home in Washington for Chinese diplomats. Yung was able to obtain a lease for the grand townhouse built for former Governor Alexander Shephard at 1705 K Street NW, facing Farragut Square (Figure 1). Shephard had declared bankruptcy only a few years prior, and the question of title to his former home would be tied up in court proceedings for many years. Nevertheless, the Chinese were able to obtain a lease, and this became the first Chinese Legation when minister Chen Lanbin arrived in 1878.⁵

The prestigious townhouse, prominently located at the corner of K Street and Connecticut Avenue, set the standard for Chinese diplomatic residences in Washington. The *Evening Star* noted in 1881 that the “block between K and L streets on Connecticut Avenue might fairly be called diplomatic row. The Chinese legation is at one corner, the French at the other, and between the two are the Swedish, Russian, Austrian, Turkish, and Italian legations. The British legation is but two blocks distant on the same avenue.”⁶

The legation did not remain at the Shepherd mansion for very long. A newspaper item claimed that the Chinese “move nearly every year.” After the Shepherd Mansion, “The next house they occupied was a large rookery of a house on H street of a very inferior quality in comparison with the Shepherd house. It is now a boarding-house. Last winter they occupied a small house on Massachusetts avenue. This was a handsome place, but very restricted in size.” The next move, in 1885, was to a large mansion on Dupont Circle known as the Stewart Castle.⁷

⁴ Trieschmann, et al.

⁵ U.S. State Department, “History of the U.S. and China,” retrieved Dec. 4, 2023, from <https://china.usembassy-china.org.cn/history-of-the-u-s-and-china/>.

⁶ “Society Notes,” *Evening Star*, Jan. 3, 1881.

⁷ “The Chinese Legation,” *Hartford Courant*, Sep. 24, 1885.

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Figure 1: The Shepherd Mansion (at the corner), circa 1880. *Library of Congress*.

Like the Shepherd Mansion, Stewart Castle was designed by German American architect Adolf Cluss. It was completed in 1873 and demolished in 1901. Built for Senator William Morris Stewart of Nevada, it was the first house constructed on what would become Dupont Circle. The Chinese Legation gave formal dinners and receptions here, noted for their formality. “There is no dancing at the entertainments given by the Chinese Minister. The large ball-room of Stewart Castle is used merely for smoking and conversation.... All the arm-chairs in the house have been collected in the large parlor on the ground, where they are arranged in row after row across the floor until the room looks like the auditorium of some very cozy lecture hall, or like a parlor car on a railroad, only larger.” A posed photograph taken by Frances B. Johnston at Stewart Castle shows Chinese diplomats reading in a parlor cluttered with books (Figure 2).⁸

⁸ James M. Goode, *Capital Losses*, 2nd ed., (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 96; “The Foreign Ministers,” *Washington Post*, Oct. 20, 1886, 2.

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Figure 2: Chinese diplomats at Stewart Castle, circa 1890. *Library of Congress.*

In the 1890s, the Chinese Legation resided in two other large mansions before constructing their own building in 1902. Postings to Washington were typically about three years, and when a new minister was assigned, he often would choose a new residence for the legation. In 1893, newly appointed Minister Yang Yu leased a pair of large brownstone homes that had just been erected in what was then a suburban residential location, the northeast corner of 14th and Yale (now Fairmont) streets NW in Columbia Heights (Figure 3). Each of the adjoining Romanesque Revival houses contained 22 rooms, including a large 25- by 75-foot ballroom in the corner house. In addition to Yang and his family, some twenty attachés and other staff occupied the houses.⁹

The Columbia Heights mission allowed more room for large events than the previous legation house. It was at this location that the famous Chinese leader Li Hongzhang stayed during his celebrated trip to the United States in September 1896. Despite unsuccessfully advocating for modifications of the harsh immigration policies of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Hongzhang's visit was closely followed by the press and public. An urban legend developed that

⁹ "The Chinese Minister's Home," *Washington Post*, Sep. 1, 1893, 2.

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Hongzhang's chef invented chop suey while on this trip, but the dish preceded him to these shores.¹⁰



Figure 3: The Chinese Legation in Columbia Heights was later home to the Fairmont Seminary for Girls. Collection of John DeFerrari.

Yang Yu departed in 1897 and was replaced by Wu Ting Fang, who moved the legation back to the Dupont Circle neighborhood, leasing the large T. Franklin Schneider mansion, another massive Romanesque Revival structure, at 18th and Q Streets NW (Figure 4). Schneider was one of the city's most prolific architects and builders of this era, and leasing his mansion was a statement of prestige and prominence for the Chinese government. The granite Schneider mansion, built in 1890 and demolished in 1957, was one of the architect's most important houses in the city's West End.¹¹

Wu Ting Fang (1842-1922) was a prominent lawyer, diplomat, and politician who would serve in later years as Minister of Foreign Affairs and briefly as acting premier of the Republic of China. He learned English at an Anglican school in Hong Kong and studied law in the United Kingdom, joining the English bar. After serving as Li Hongzhang's adviser and interpreter, he was appointed minister to the United States, where he worked to counter discrimination against Chinese immigrants. Maintaining a prominent legation building in Washington was an important element

¹⁰ "Li Hung Chang Sees The Sights" and "Chinese Legation," *Washington Times*, Sep. 4, 1896, 1-2.

¹¹ Goode, 132-3; "Legation's New Home," *Washington Post*, Jun. 20, 1897, 14.

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in projecting the dignity and refinement of the Chinese people to Americans. In 1914, long after completing his diplomatic appointment, Wu would publish in English his memoirs, *America, Through the Spectacles of an Oriental Diplomat*.



Figure 4: The T. Franklin Schneider mansion at 18th and Q Streets NW. *Library of Congress*.

Building the Chinese Legation

In March 1902, Minister Wu announced plans to build a new legation building on property the legation had just purchased on the northeast corner of 19th Street and Vernon Street NW in Washington Heights. The idea may have been suggested by other diplomats, and there is little doubt that Wu saw the construction of a purpose-built legation as the next logical step in promoting the image of China in Washington as a modern, advanced nation.¹² The *Washington Post* summarized the proposed design of the building:

¹² "Chinese Legation Quarters," *Washington Post*, April 16, 1901.

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The building will, without doubt, be the finest legation building at the National Capital, and will be simple and dignified. The ground on which the legation will be erected is about 100 feet square and commands a fine view of the city. One building, which will face on Vernon avenue, will be arranged as a residence for Minister Wu and his family, and will be connected with the other building only by a door. The building which will have an entrance on Nineteenth street will contain the legation offices, with fourteen bedrooms. Here also will be the library and side rooms.¹³

The complex would contain some 40 rooms, including a ballroom, dining room, parlor, and music room on the first floor of the main residence. The new building would be “arranged to suit Minister Wu’s general plans” and would rival the British Embassy on Connecticut Avenue—the only other legation building in Washington constructed specifically for that purpose by a foreign government. When the building was nearing completion in late 1902, the *Post* noted, “The architecture is of the Elizabethan type, which style was chosen by former Minister Wu, who preferred something American or adaptable to American home life rather than a building of the Chinese type.”¹⁴

The minister’s personal apartment was located in two large rooms on the second floor at the front of the house. Thus, he could step onto the balustraded porch at the southwest corner of the building and overlook the wooded expanse that would later be occupied by the Washington Hilton Hotel as well as the skyline of the city below. The parlor and conservatory on the first floor off the grand, skylit center hall, were furnished in contrasting styles: one “with fresh, new American furniture and might be the parlor of any palatial American residence,” while the other “is to be a Chinese room. Several of the odd pieces of ebony and teak wood furniture that were in the old legation have been transferred here and many new pieces... will be added,” according to the *Post*. The “automobile house,” another of the car-loving minister’s personal choices, was likely to be used as a storeroom by his successor, the *Post* opined.¹⁵

Being custom-built for China, the new building avoided a delicate issue that had plagued the legation in previous rented houses. As reported in the *Washington Times*, Chinese custom was that no official should sleep in quarters that were below those of a lower-ranking individual. This had caused endless inconvenience, because most large houses were designed with the main bedroom on the lowest sleeping level (usually the second floor) and with smaller bedrooms for staff and servants above them, often in attic space. This “made it necessary for the minister to sleep in a small room up under the roof while the handsomest apartments on the lower floors were assigned to the menials.” The new legation’s layout placed secretaries and other lower officials in the attached quarters over the chancery and servants in the basement.¹⁶

¹³ “Real Estate Market,” *Washington Post*, Mar. 30, 1902, 26.

¹⁴ “Real Estate Market,” *Washington Post*, Dec. 21, 1902, 28.

¹⁵ “In The New Legation,” *Washington Post*, May 2, 1903, 2. This article contradicts the earlier *Post* claim that Minister Wu had been involved in planning the design of the legation, stating that Wu simply asked architect Wood only for “a fine house, big enough, and to cost about \$80,000.” But the article adds, “Or, at least, that is what the secretaries of the legation say,” leaving the true extent of Wu’s involvement uncertain.

¹⁶ “China’s New Temple of Hospitality in America,” *Washington Times*, Jan. 3, 1904, 7.

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Construction of the house took place from spring 1902 until early 1903. When complete, the *Washington Times* called it a “model home,” admiring the “red brick, burned in imitation of the brick of two centuries ago,” an element of its Jacobean design. “In no part of the house is there the least suggestion of the Oriental. The building was planned by an American architect and is an excellent example of the modern American home.” The new building fulfilled the role of projecting the Chinese Legation as the equal of any in Washington—and the Chinese people as equally worthy of respect.¹⁷

Despite Wu’s planning, he was not the first Chinese minister to occupy the building. Wu was recalled in July 1902 and succeeded by Liang Cheng. Liang, a graduate of Yale University who spoke fluent English, had been recommended by Wu. Upon his arrival in Washington in April 1903, Liang announced:

I can follow no better example than that of Minister Wu. He tried to educate the American people out of their prejudice against my countrymen as a race.... [T]he American government and American statesmen have shown the most friendly spirit toward China in the troublesome times of the last three years, and I hope much from that [referring to the Boxer Rebellion and its aftermath of western troops in China].... I know what unrestricted immigration would mean, and I realize how much this is an issue with the American people, and with American politicians. I will do what I can, but do not expect to do too much. It is a question of hoping.¹⁸

The *Washington Post* reported that “eleven big vanloads” had been transferred, one or two a day, to complete the move of the legation from the Schneider mansion to the new legation home on 19th Street.¹⁹

Legation activities, 1903 to 1935

Liang’s term ended in 1907, his primary accomplishment being the reduction of China’s indemnity payments to the U.S. for the “Boxer” siege of the diplomatic quarter in Beijing.²⁰ He was unable to convince American lawmakers to relax any of the Chinese Exclusion Act restrictions on immigration, which had been extended indefinitely in 1902. At the end of his term, Liang was replaced by Wu Ting Fang, who returned to the U.S. to finally reside in the legation building he had commissioned. Wu’s second term lasted from 1907 to 1909.

Alfred Sao-ke Sze (1877-1958) served two separate terms at the Chinese legation between 1920 and 1936, making him one of the most prominent Chinese diplomats of this era. Sze had already spent many years in Washington, attending Central High School as a youth. He had worked at the legation when it moved to 19th Street and recalled that people thought Minister Wu was crazy to build the legation so far out of town in 1902. In 1911, Sze was appointed by the last emperor to an earlier term, but he was unable to travel to the U.S. to serve his term when the Qing Dynasty was

¹⁷ “The New Chinese Legation,” *Washington Times*, Apr. 19, 1903, 8.

¹⁸ “Sir Liang Arrives,” *Washington Post*, Apr. 4, 1903, 1.

¹⁹ “Sir Liang Arrives,” *Washington Post*, Apr. 4, 1903, 1.

²⁰ Much of the money was redirected to support the studies of Chinese university students in America.

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overthrown and replaced by the Republic of China. His diplomatic work in the 1920s was key to securing United States support for China in response to Japanese aggression in Manchuria and northeast China.²¹ Unfortunately, a major role of the Chinese ministers was the protest of outrages against their subjects who had suffered violence and intimidation, especially in America's far West. On the other hand, among the consular duties was the defense of their people accused of crimes. In 1924, Sze brokered a truce between the warring Hip Sing and On Leong tongs, business associations who vied for primacy in both legitimate and illicit trades in America's Chinatowns.²²



Figure 5: Yin Chen "Betty" Sze on the front steps of the Legation house in 1924. *Library of Congress*.

Sze lived at the Legation with his wife and young daughter, Yin Chen "Betty" Sze (Figure 5). In her memoirs, Betty Sze recalls that legation bustled with activity. A doorman was stationed at the main entrance daily to open to greet guests or family and was kept very busy. Inside, she recalled the high stained-glass dome far up at the center of the main foyer as well as an "enormous chandelier" hanging at a level with the second story. The second-story gallery, overlooking the

²¹ Carroll Peeke, "New Chinese Ambassador Is Real Washingtonian," *Washington Times*, Jun. 1, 1935.

²² "Chinese Factions Agree on Truce," *Evening Star*, Oct. 17, 1924, 5.

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foyer, was a favorite spot for young Betty to observe arrivals to gala functions in the downstairs rooms. The first room on the left of the foyer as one entered was the Gold Room, “decorated with gilt and brocade French furniture and a magnificent blue, gold and cream Chinese rug.” Next on the left was the Drawing Room, a large reception room with a crimson circular sofa at its center. The glassy enclosed porch adjoining the rooms on the left she knew as the Conservatory. On the right side of the foyer, the first room was the piano-equipped Music Room, which doubled as a cloakroom during social events. Behind it was the Dining Room, “with its red damask and mahogany walls and a dining table that seated thirty people under a Tiffany chandelier.” At the inner end of the foyer rose the staircase, which “swept up to a halfway landing where it divided into two separate flights that proceeded, right and left, to the second floor.” [The current staircase does not have a divided landing.] At the rear was “a heavy baize-covered door that led to the Chancellery offices. These were an entire little world on its own, a rabbit warren of rooms on the ground floor alive with activity and the noise of typewriters and telephones. On the upper floors were the living quarters for those of the staff who preferred to live in...”²³

In 1935, the U.S. and the Republic of China agreed to raise their diplomatic missions to the status of embassies, and Sze became the first Chinese ambassador to the United States. The 19th Street legation building became the first Chinese Embassy in Washington.²⁴

Disposition of the Legation

In 1937, Ambassador Chengting T. Wang leased the sprawling Twin Oaks estate, 3225 Woodley Road NW in Cleveland Park, to be the new ambassador’s residence. Twin Oaks had been built in 1888 as a summer home for Gardiner Greene Hubbard, founder of the National Geographic Society. Then, in 1943, China purchased the former Gibson Fahnestock House at 2311 Massachusetts Avenue NW and moved its chancery to that location. The ornate, Beaux-Arts Fahnestock House, designed by architect Nathan Wyeth, is now the Embassy of Haiti. After moving its chancery to the Massachusetts Avenue site, the 19th Street building was arguably no longer needed. However, the Chinese government retained it and apparently continued using it as a residential facility for diplomats and their families. The 19th Street building remained in the hands of the government of the Republic of China until the early 1960s.²⁵

The building was then acquired by Alva A. Dawson, former wife of President Harry S Truman’s personnel advisor, Maj. Gen. Donald Dawson, and board member of the Women’s National Democratic Club. By 1964, the building was derelict. “Vandals have stripped the building of sinks, radiators and any other fixtures they could yank out of the walls and ceilings,” the *Evening Star* reported. “Many windows are broken. Wooden boards cover the front door and first-floor windows. A small sign on one of the boards says the place is condemned.”²⁶

²³ From a photocopied excerpt of Betty Sze’s published memoirs, provided by a member of the board of directors of the Chinese Embassy Condominium. No bibliographic information was available.

²⁴ “Legation Made Embassy as China Gains in Rank,” *Washington Post*, Aug. 22, 1935, 12.

²⁵ U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, *Massachusetts Avenue Architecture Vol. 1* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), 393.

²⁶ “Old Building Preferred to Parking Lot,” *Evening Star*, May 21, 1964, B-4.

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Dawson, along with District Parking Services, Inc., applied to the Board of Zoning Adjustment for a five-year zoning exception that would allow them to tear down the mansion and replace it with a parking lot. They argued that the lot was needed for overflow from the new Washington Hilton nearby. The Kalorama Block Council and other groups objected to the plan, not wanting a busy parking lot in their residential neighborhood. The BZA denied the application.²⁷ Dawson changed plans and announced the building would be renovated and converted into a 20-unit apartment building. After serving as a rental apartment house for some 20 years, the building was again renovated and converted to condominiums in 1987.²⁸

Political backdrop to the Legation's construction

The construction of the Chinese Legation followed a period during which the United States' diplomatic relationships with the world were being redefined, and its relationship with the Chinese government suffered prolonged stress. The United States' 1898 victory in the Spanish-American War dramatically signaled its emergence as an economic and military power. The United States bought Puerto Rico, as well as Guam and the Philippine Islands, and occupied Cuba. As the United States' interests in Asia were expanding, China was under threat of being partitioned and colonized by imperial powers with extensive commercial interests in the country. To maintain "free trade" and ensure American access to Chinese markets, Secretary of State John Hay initiated the United States' first formal doctrine toward China. Hay's "Open Door" policy was established by sending a series of official notes to these powers—France, Germany, Britain, Italy, Japan, and Russia—requesting they maintain Chinese territorial integrity and sovereignty, as well as the open use of the treaty ports in their spheres of influence. This applied a moral gloss of defending the oppressed over the naked self interest in opening Chinese markets to American products such as oil and cotton textiles.

At the end of the 1890s, an anti-foreign political movement rose in China, which became known in the West as "the Boxers." In early 1900, after a series of violent attacks on foreigners and Chinese Christians, Boxer forces, largely students and peasants, marched on Beijing with the support of the ruling Qing dynasty. For about two months, they besieged a large group of foreign nationals and Chinese Christians barricaded within the capital's legation district. United States Marines played an essential role in defending the legation district as well as participating in a multinational military force which fought its way inland to lift the siege. After the Boxer movement collapsed in 1901, the imperialist powers, which now included the United States, effectively bankrupted the Qing government by forcing it to pay a huge punitive indemnity. This new economic relationship gave the imperial powers even more dominance over the Chinese government.²⁹

Controversies over Chinese immigration continued to roil American politics. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which had suspended Chinese immigration to the United States for ten years, had been extended and expanded by a series of treaties and Congressional acts. The 1892

²⁷ "Citizen Fights Zoners on Two Fronts," *Washington Post*, May 21, 1964, B2; "Correction," *Washington Post*, May 22, 1964, F7; "Zoners Ban Club's New Pool in NW," *Washington Post*, Jun. 3, 1964, B4.

²⁸ Robert J. Lewis, "Building Boom On In Adams-Morgan," *Evening Star*, Nov. 7, 1964, A-14.

²⁹ <https://history.state.gov/countries/issues/china-us-relations>.

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Geary Act, which placed further restrictions on Chinese residents of the United States, had extended the prohibition on Chinese immigration for another decade.³⁰

In April 1902, just a few weeks after plans to build the new Chinese Legation were announced, the House of Representatives engaged in a debate over Chinese immigration which reveals the racist attitudes of the times. Major voices included future Speaker of the House James “Champ” Clark (D-MO) and Robert Hitt (R-IL), chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, who backed a bill sponsored by West Coast representatives which maintained or strengthened existing strictures. Hitt explained that, while the United States “desires to obtain its fair share of commerce with the East and with China” and to welcome “the privileged classes, the genuine merchants and students... every effort has been made to secure the exclusion of Chinese coolies.” Clark broadened the issue, stating “the Chinese question was the question of race on the Pacific Coast. It was to that section what the Negro question was to the south.” “[T]he people of the south knew best how to deal with the Negro question and the people of the west coast know how to best deal with the Chinese question.” The bill’s author, Julius Kahn, a Republican representing San Francisco, next charged the Chinese with being duplicitous, murderous opium addicts who threatened “the American laborer and mechanic, in his neat little home, seated at his fireside, surrounded by his wife and little ones.”³¹

On the Senate side, John H. Mitchell (R-OR) opined that exclusion was necessary “for the general welfare of the people of the country,” not simply to protect labor but for “the broader doctrine of protection against noxious infection of those institutions, which in the grand aggregate make up American civilization.” Senator Matthew Quay (R-PA) proposed an unsuccessful amendment to exempt Chinese Christians and admit those who had recently defended the foreign legation district in Beijing. Senator George Hoar (R-MA) raised a lone voice protesting the exclusion of any person from the United States based on his or her race. The final act maintained the policy of exclusion while omitting several proposed harsh provisions.

Early building patterns among foreign legations

In the late 1890s, Washington had 30 foreign legations, roughly equal in number representing the Americas and Europe, and with a few from Asian nations. Most legations were convenient to the Department of State, which was then situated in the Executive Office Building on Lafayette Square, but there was no single diplomatic district. Purpose-built embassies were almost entirely a twentieth-century phenomenon. Wealthier nations often rented or purchased residences in fashionable downtown blocks for their legations, while other countries rented space in apartment buildings. Residential buildings were well-suited to the use, as legations were domestic as well as diplomatic and administrative spaces. The minister or ambassador and his family typically lived on premises, along with their servants.

In 1896, small clusters of legations were scattered throughout the northwest neighborhoods of Washington. East of Connecticut Avenue, the legations of Chile, Argentina, and Switzerland

³⁰ <https://history.state.gov/countries/issues/china-us-relations>.

³¹ “Chinese Exclusion Up in Both Houses,” *Washington Times*, Apr 3, 1902, 1.

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occupied houses in the fashionable blocks of K Street between 13th and 16th Street, with Belgium and Mexico nearby on I Street. Austria-Hungary's legation occupied a large house in the 1700 block of Rhode Island Avenue. Between Dupont and Scott circles, Nicaragua and El Salvador shared both a minister and a location at 1623 Massachusetts Avenue, as did Honduras and Guatemala at 1525 18th Street. Germany's legation was relatively isolated in a Massachusetts Avenue mansion between Scott and Thomas circles.

West of Connecticut Avenue, the legation of France stood at 1710 H Street, with Russia a block northwest at 1829 I. Legations representing Denmark, Spain, Costa Rica, and the joint government of Sweden and Norway were strung along the 20th Street corridor between O and R streets. The crossroads at Connecticut Avenue, N Street, and 18th Street separated the Brazilian Legation from that of Great Britain, constructed as the capital's first purpose-built foreign mission in 1882.

Only a few legations stood outside these precincts. Turkey occupied a house near 18th and R streets, while the Venezuela and Korea legations were situated on Iowa (Logan) Circle NW. The house at 2701 14th Street, which China occupied for several years, was the first legation outside the original city boundary at present-day Florida Avenue.

A decade later, the distribution of legations had shifted significantly, with some, like China, penetrating the former city limit at Florida Avenue. Most legations remained downtown. Some rented space in apartment houses, hotels, and commercial buildings, including Guatemala and Panama at the newly opened Highland apartment house on Connecticut Avenue; El Salvador at the Portland Flats, the Dominican Republic at the Burlington Hotel, Siam (Thailand) at the Arlington Hotel, Venezuela at the New Willard, and Cuba in the Union Trust Building. The legations of the Argentine Republic, Austria-Hungary, Costa Rica, and Brazil were strung along the 18th Street corridor between K Street and Massachusetts Avenue. Spain's and Italy's legations were located on New Hampshire Avenue just east of Dupont Circle, while Switzerland's, Nicaragua's, and Portugal's lay west of the circle. Honduras and Greece had moved outside the old city line to locations in the 1800 and 2000 blocks of Columbia Road, while the newly opened Persian Legation was at 1421 Monroe Street in Columbia Heights.

The early twentieth century saw shifts that signified a more fundamental realignment of the diplomatic cityscape. One was an attempt to establish a formal diplomatic district. Mary Foote Henderson was a civic visionary who sought to transform the rugged slopes of Meridian Hill into an enclave of magnificent mansions and public buildings that would include a new executive mansion. Henderson believed that "As [16th Street] was on a line with the White House and centrally in touch with the state and other governmental departments, it seemed especially desirable as a location for our foreign representatives."³² A focal point of her vision was a series of palatial residences designed by architect George Oakley Totten to her specifications. Her objective was to rent or sell them to foreign governments for use as legations. While it is rumored that Henderson was unable to lure the Italian legation to her first commissioned house, the "Pink Palace" at 2600 16th Street NW, she was more successful with her second. In 1907, the French government leased an exuberant Beaux-Arts mansion at 16th Street and Kalorama Road, becoming

³² Mayme Ober Peak, "Gentlewoman Who Is Landlady to the Nations," *Seattle Daily Times*, Oct. 1, 1922.

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the first foreign legation to move into what would become a Henderson-sponsored enclave of embassies on Meridian Hill.

Shortly after the French Embassy building was completed, Henderson commissioned Totten to design duplex mansions at 2620 and 2622 16th Street in a Spanish Renaissance Revival style.³³ These two mansions were first occupied by the Danish and Swedish embassies, although other legations, including, fittingly, Spain's, leased them at later times. A Totten-designed Beaux-Arts residence at 16th and Fuller streets, completed in 1910, was another effort that proved successful only in the long term, remaining vacant until it was purchased by the newly independent nation of Poland in 1919.³⁴ An Elizabethan Revival design by Totten in 1909 for a lot to its south was probably intended to lure the British legation from Connecticut Avenue, but remained unbuilt.³⁵

Henderson's embassy-building later included another grand house at 16th and Fuller Street NW that, after Congress declined to purchase it for a vice-presidential residence, became the Spanish embassy. Her lot south of the Polish Embassy was sold and became the Cuban Embassy, and several other embassies moved into other great Meridian Hill houses, or, in the case of Italy, eventually constructed its own palatial embassy. While 16th Street never quite became an avenue of embassies, by 1910 its corridor also included the Bolivian Legation near Q Street and the Ecuadorian and Russian embassies in the 1600 block of I Street. Just a few years later, the Russian Legation would move to the palatial Pullman Mansion at 1125 16th Street, setting a new standard for diplomatic elegance.

Despite Mary Henderson's wealth and influence, her imagined 16th Street Embassy Row would be surpassed by the real thing in the Sheridan-Kalorama neighborhood and particularly the environs of Sheridan Circle.

Architect Waddy B. Wood

Born in St. Louis, Waddy Butler Wood (1869-1944) was a prominent and highly sought-after architect in D.C. from 1892 to 1940, with a wide variety of commissions. Remarkably, he was self-taught in an era when many successful architects traveled to the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris to receive rigorous academic training before presuming to design palatial mansions for the wealthy. Wood was creative and comfortable working in a wide range of styles. The Chinese Legation was one of his early works, and it reflected a keen ability to employ historical architectural motifs in a way that expressed grandeur and dignity as well as a certain homey romanticism.³⁶

³³ "Houses in Spanish Style are Planned by Hendersons," *Washington Times*, Oct. 13, 1907; "Houses Near Completion," *Washington Post*, Jun. 7, 1908.

³⁴ "New Diplomatic Home," *Washington Post*, Jan. 24, 1909; "Hendersons Build Embassy," *Evening Star*, Jun. 16, 1909.

³⁵ "Home for a Diplomat," *Washington Post*, Apr. 11, 1909; Kim Prothro Williams, "Meridian Hill Historic District" registration form for the *National Register of Historic Places*, 2014.

³⁶ Emily Hotaling Eig, "Waddy Butler Wood: A Biographical Sketch of the Architect" in David W. Look and Carol L. Perrault, eds., *The Interior Building: Its Architecture and Art* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1986), 19-21.

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Wood grew up in Ivy, Virginia, and attended the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College for two years as an engineering student before coming to Washington in 1891 to pursue his goal of becoming an architect. He secured a job as a draftsman while reading about architecture at night at the Library of Congress. The following year he went into business for himself, using social connections to gain entrée with important clients. His first major commission, in 1895, was for the landmark Georgetown Car Barn for the Capitol Traction Company. The following year he designed another car barn, also landmarked, on East Capitol Street.³⁷

In 1902, Wood formed a partnership with Edmund Donn, Jr., a trained architect, and William I. Deming, a construction engineer. Wood served as the firm's chief designer. In addition to the commission for the Chinese Legation, Wood undertook several other impressive house projects, particularly in the Kalorama and Washington Heights neighborhoods, which were rapidly developing as an enclave for the well-to-do. Wood made imaginative use of design elements drawn from diverse historical sources. Other notable residential projects included the Alice Pike Barney Studio House (1902), 2306 Massachusetts Avenue NW, an eclectic mansion with elements of the Arts and Crafts and Mission styles; the Woodrow Wilson House (1915) at 2340 S Street NW; the Charles L. Fitzhugh House (1904) at 2253 R Street NW, another Sheridan Circle house that is now the residence of the Philippine ambassador; and the Bachelor Apartment House (1905) at 1737 H Street NW, another eclectic building with Jacobean and Beaux-Arts elements.³⁸

Wood also designed many civic buildings, including extensive temporary World War I buildings for the federal government, for which he donated his time and effort. His other landmark civic buildings include the Union Trust Building at 740 15th Street NW (1907); the old Masonic Temple (now the National Museum of Women in the Arts) at 1250 New York Avenue NW (1908); and the Department of the Interior at 1849 C Street, N.W. (1937), his largest and most important federal commission and the last major work of his career.³⁹ Many of his buildings have been landmarked and listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Wood's adoption of the Elizabethan/Jacobean Revival style

Waddy Wood's Chinese Legation building is an early and ornate example of the Elizabethan/Jacobean Revival style for residential buildings in the District of Columbia. The style was one of several eclectic variations on revival styles that stood in contrast to the Beaux-Arts neoclassicism that was dominant at the time. These reflected a romantic impulse to conjure up comforting images of past landscapes, a trend fueled, in part, by the English Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth century. The Colonial Revival, including Georgian and Federal variations, would grow to be dominant in residential architecture by the 1920s, but other styles

³⁷ EHT Tracerics, *D.C. Architects Directory: Waddy Butler Wood*, Oct. 2010.

³⁸ Eve Lydia Barsoum, "Alice Pike Barney Studio House" registration form for the *National Register of Historic Places*, 1995; Leila Mechlen, "The Work of Wood, Donn & Deming, Washington, D.C.," *Architectural Record*, Vol. XIX, No. 4, Apr. 1906, 245-258.

³⁹ Eig, op. cit.

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based on English antecedents, like Elizabethan, Tudor, and Jacobean revival styles were also popular.⁴⁰

Wood's design for the Chinese Legation relies heavily on Elizabethan styling and Gothic details, with classical Jacobean elements as well, such as the stone sunroom on the southwest corner with arched windows, pilasters, and a stone balustrade. The massing of the building is symmetrical, like Jacobean antecedents, whereas Elizabethan houses tend to embrace asymmetry. Typical Elizabethan Revival elements include the prominent peaked gables, varied roof line, limestone door and window surrounds, multi-paned windows in diverse arrangements, dominant chimneys, and the elaborate stone entry portico. Wood's design avoids the use of limestone quoins, which would otherwise be typical for Elizabethan Revival houses.

Examples of Elizabethan/Jacobean Revival architecture can be found across the District, including among houses built in suburban neighborhoods of the early twentieth century. Examples include 2301 California Street NW in Kalorama, designed by David L. Stern (1928); the Clark Griffith House, 4720 16th Street NW in Sixteenth Street Heights, designed by James E. Cooper (1926); 4811 17th Street NW, designed by Charles R. Wire (1927); as well as the houses in the Foxhall Village Historic District, which were designed in the 1920s in a mix of Tudor and Elizabethan Revival styles.

One of the most prominent Elizabethan Revival residences in D.C. is the former William Watson Lawrence House, 2221 Kalorama Road NW, designed by Jules Henri de Sibour (1910). Now the residence of the Ambassador of France, the large mansion features quoins and beige brick instead of red. Like the Chinese Legation building, it is imposing and evocative of the nobility of an earlier era.⁴¹

The Tudor/Elizabethan Revival style also appeared in larger buildings of this era, such as the Wallace Memorial United Methodist Presbyterian Church (now the First Baptist Church) at 712 Randolph Street NW in Petworth, designed by Charles W. Bolton & Son (1914); the landmarked Eastern High School at 1200 1st Street NE (1923), designed by Snowden Ashford; and the landmarked Tudor Hall Apartments (now the Henley Park Hotel) at 926 Massachusetts Avenue NW, designed by Walter Granville Guss (1918).

⁴⁰ Emily Hotaling Eig and Julie Mueller, Sheridan-Kalorama Historic District *National Register of Historic Places* nomination, (Washington, D.C.: Jul. 1989), Sec. 7, 49.

⁴¹ James M. Goode, *Capital Houses: Historic Residences of Washington, D.C., and Its Environs 1735-1965* (New York: Acanthus Press, 2015), 402-408.

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The Washington Post.

The Washington Times.

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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
- 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: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.25 acre

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 38.917206 | Longitude: -77.043659 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

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Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description

The Old Chinese Legation occupies Lot 45 in Square 2555, an irregular quadrilateral running 109.9 feet along 19th Street, 83.96 feet along Vernon Street, 119.5 feet along an alley on the north, and 104 feet along a property line on the east.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries are those of the building's historic lot, created in 1902 for the purpose of its construction and unchanged since.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: John DeFerrari and Douglas Peter Sefton (DCPL Trustees), and Zachary Burt (DCPL Staff)

organization: DC Preservation League

street & number: 641 S Street NW, Suite 300

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

e-mail: info@dcpreservation.org

telephone: (202) 783-5144

date: January 18, 2024

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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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

#	Title	Camera Facing	Photographer	Date
1	Postcard image of the Chinese Legation, from a photo likely taken within the first decade after the building's construction	NE	Unknown	Undated
2	Old Chinese Legation, Front (south) Elevation from Vernon Street NW	NW	Jack Boucher	4/75
3	Old Chinese Legation, Front (south) Elevation from Vernon Street NW	N	John DeFerrari	12/6/23
4	Old Chinese Legation view from 19 th Street NW	NE	John DeFerrari	12/12/23
5	Old Chinese Legation, Front (south) Elevation from Vernon Street NW	NW	John DeFerrari	12/6/23
6	Main entrance on Vernon Street NW	NW	Jack Boucher	4/75
7	Main entrance on Vernon Street NW	N	John DeFerrari	12/12/23
8	Detail of west gable parapet and balcony, front (south) elevation from Vernon Street NW	N	John DeFerrari	12/12/23

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9	Detail of limestone porch, southwest corner, view from Vernon Street NW	NE	John DeFerrari	12/8/23
10	West elevation view from 19 th Street NW	NE	John DeFerrari	12/8/23
11	West elevation view from 19 th Street NW	E	John DeFerrari	12/8/23
12	West elevation view from 19 th Street NW	E	John DeFerrari	12/6/23
13	North elevation view from alley	S	John DeFerrari	12/6/23
14	North and east elevations, view from alley	SW	John DeFerrari	12/12/23
15	View west from balcony atop eastern bay of main façade	W	John DeFerrari	1/11/24
16	Entrance seen from main foyer	S	John DeFerrari	1/11/24
17	Main foyer, first floor, as seen from the entrance	N	John DeFerrari	1/11/24
18	Main foyer, first floor, as seen from the staircase at the rear of the foyer	S	John DeFerrari	1/11/24

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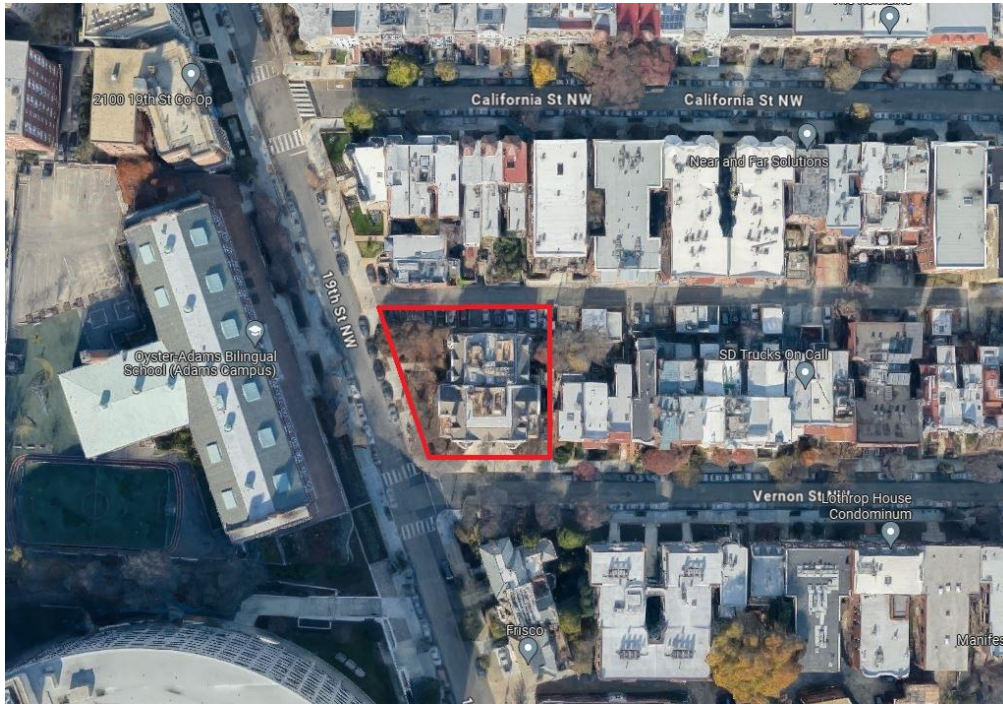
Map 1: Old Chinese Legation boundaries (DC PropertyQuest).

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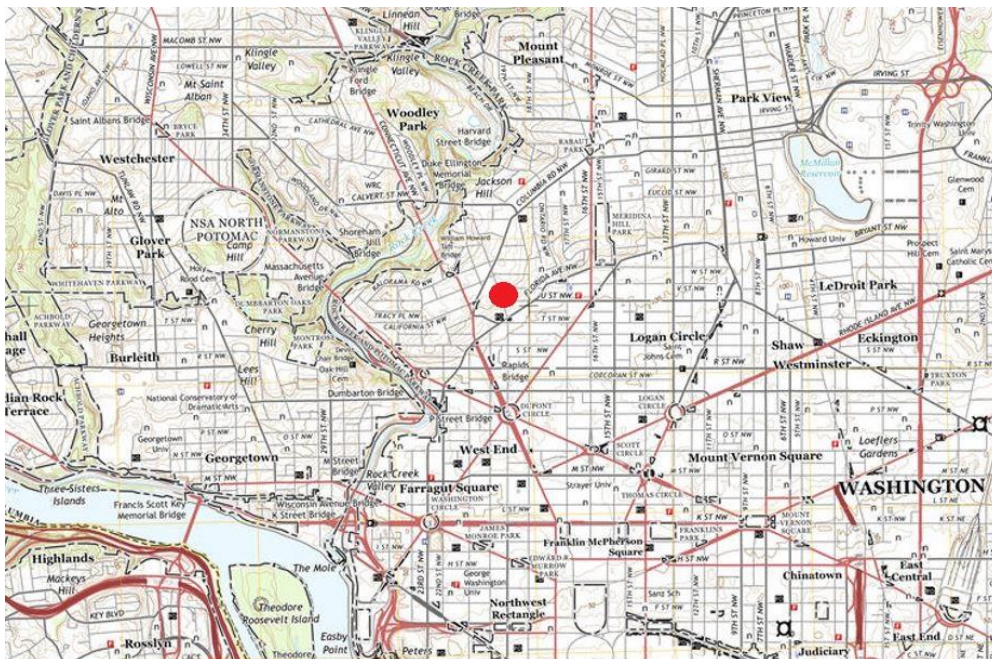
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Map 2: Old Chinese Legation property from above, with boundaries indicated in red (Google Maps).



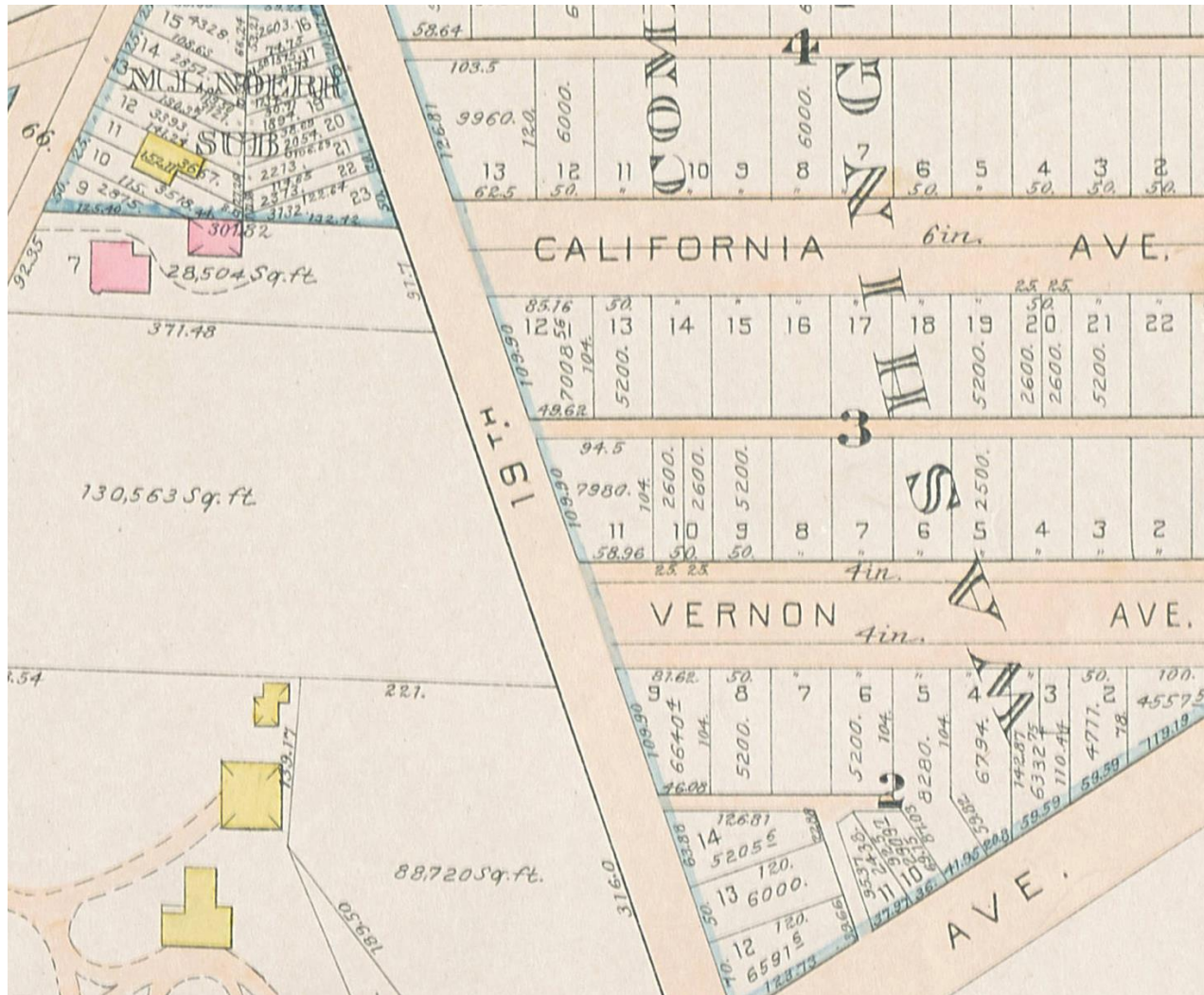
Map 3: Old Chinese Legation's location within Washington (USGS).

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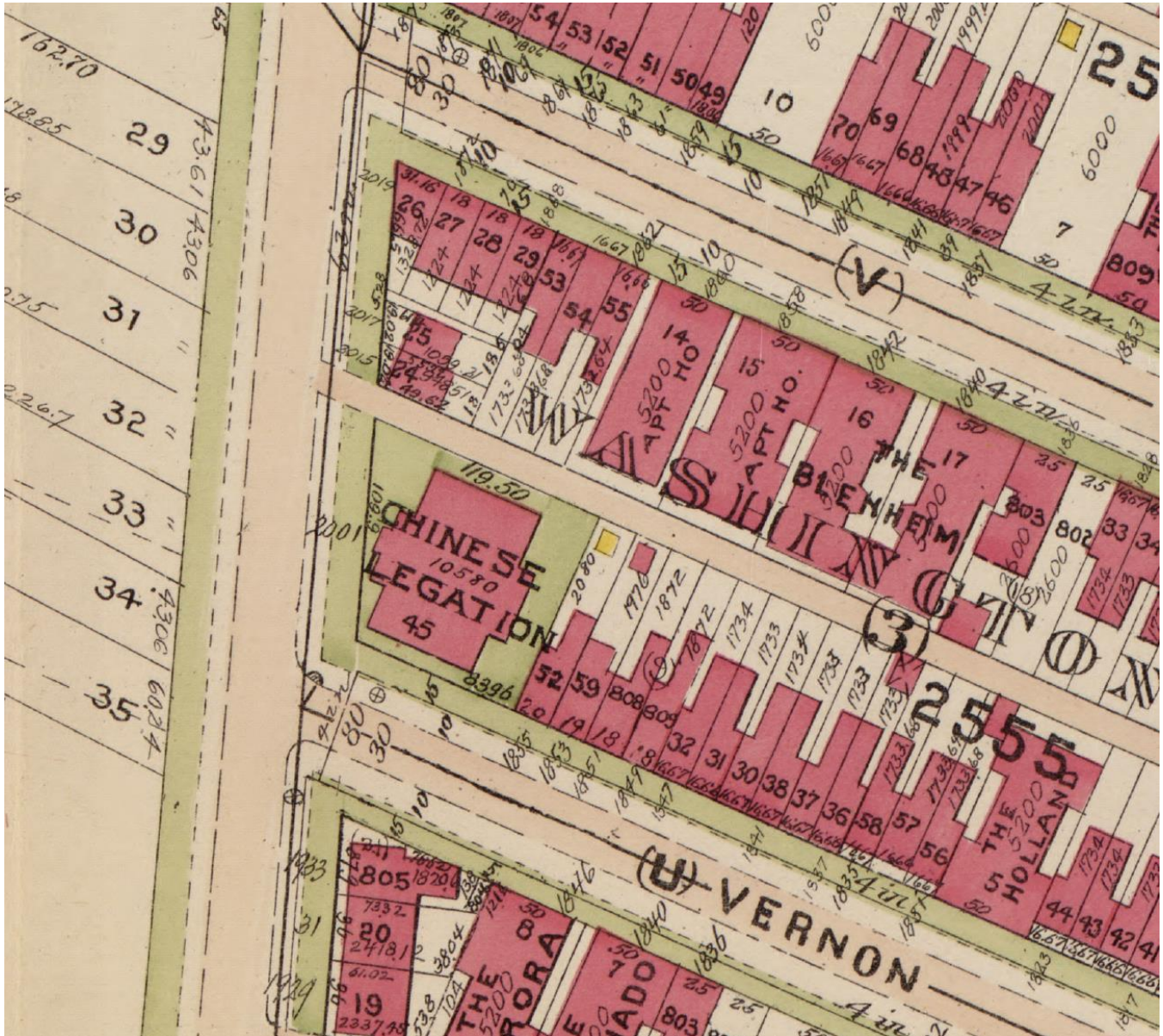
Map 4: Excerpt from Griffith M. Hopkins, *Real Estate Plat-Book of Washington, District of Columbia*, Vol. III (1894), plate 7, showing empty lots along the east side of 19th Street, including the lot on the northeast corner of 19th and Vernon Avenue, where the Chinese Legation would be built (Library of Congress).

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Map 5: Excerpt from G.W. Baist, *Baist's Real Estate Atlas of Washington, District of Columbia*, 1919, Vol. III, Plate 6 (Library of Congress).

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Photo 1: Postcard image of the Chinese Legation, from a photo likely taken within the first decade after the building's construction (author's collection).

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Photo 2: Old Chinese Legation, Front (south) Elevation from Vernon Street NW (Jack E. Boucher, HABS).

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Photo 3: Old Chinese Legation, Front (south) Elevation from Vernon Street NW (J DeFerrari).

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Photo 4: Old Chinese Legation view from 19th Street NW (J. DeFerrari).

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Photo 5: Old Chinese Legation, Front (south) Elevation from Vernon Street NW (J DeFerrari).

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Photo 6: Main entrance on Vernon Street NW (Jack E. Boucher, HABS).

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Photo 7: Main entrance on Vernon Street NW (J. DeFerrari).

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Photo 8: Detail of west gable parapet and balcony, front (south) elevation from Vernon Street NW (J. DeFerrari).

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Photo 9: Detail of limestone porch, southwest corner, view from Vernon Street NW (J. DeFerrari).

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Photo 10: West elevation view from 19th Street NW (J. DeFerrari).

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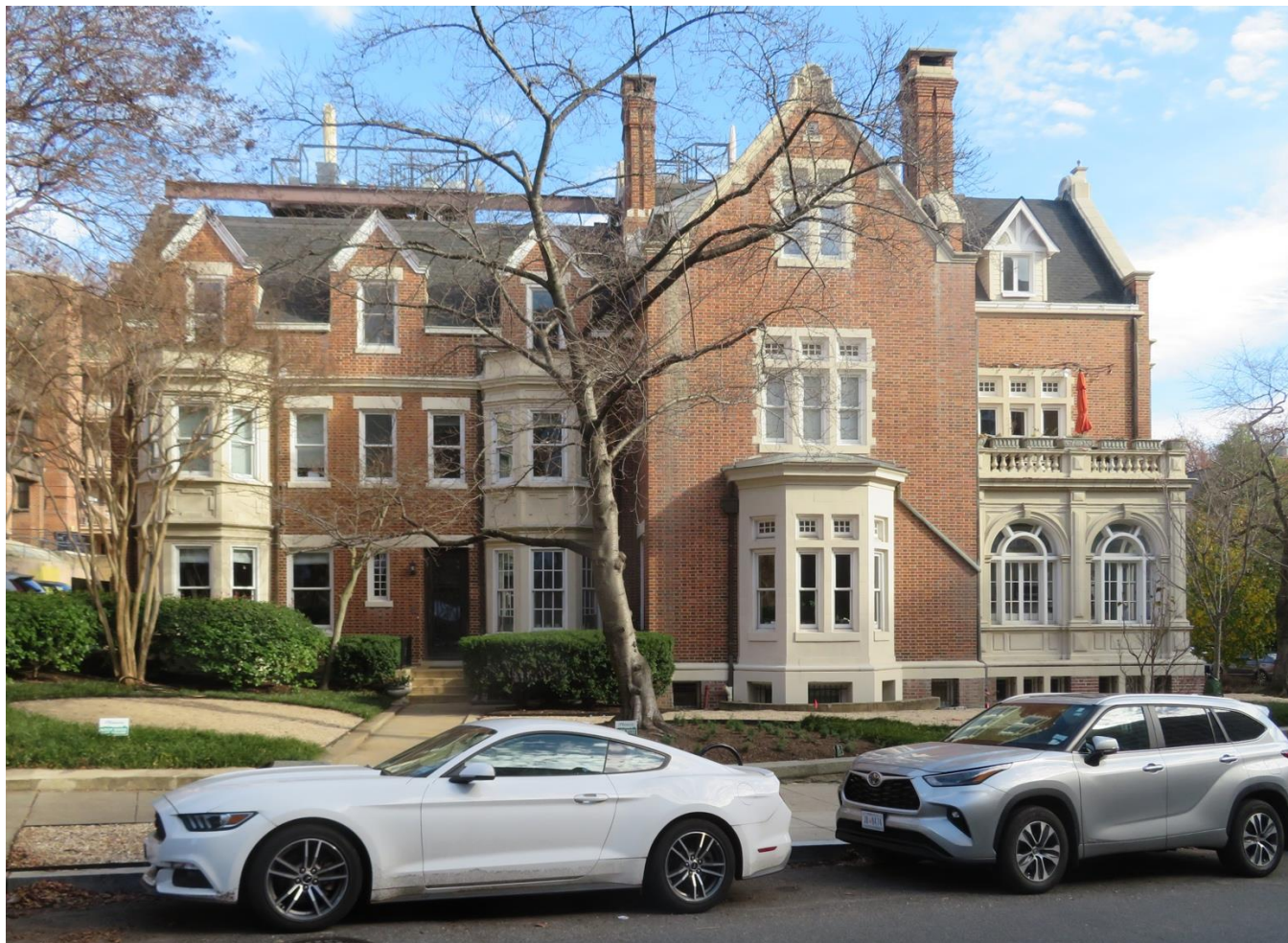


Photo 11: West elevation view from 19th Street NW (J. DeFerrari).

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Photo 12: West elevation view from 19th Street NW (J. DeFerrari).

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Photo 13: North elevation view from alley (J. DeFerrari).

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Photo 14: North and east elevations, view from alley (J. DeFerrari).

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Photo 15: View west from balcony atop eastern bay of main façade (J. DeFerrari).

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Photo 16: Entrance seen from main foyer (J DeFerrari).

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Photo 17: Main foyer, first floor, as seen from the entrance (J. DeFerrari).

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Photo 18: Main foyer, first floor, as seen from the staircase at the rear of the foyer (J. DeFerrari).