

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: Old Korean Legation
 Other names/site number: Seth Ledyard Phelps Residence
 Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

2. Location

Street & number: 1500 13th Street NW (15 Logan Circle 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 Not For Publication: Vicinity: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

| | |
|---|----------------------|
| _____ 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

6. Function or Use
Historic Functions

Government/Diplomatic Building
Residence

Current Functions

Recreation and Culture/Museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification

Late Victorian/ Second Empire

Materials:

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

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Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

The Old Korean Legation is a three-story, three-bay, double-pile, brick, Second Empire edifice characterized by a slate-covered mansard roof, English basement, and exterior end chimneys. The structure occupies a 2,434-square-foot lot in which its front (east) facade runs along the west side of 13th Street NW. The building's interior was fully restored between 2015 and 2018 to reflect how it would have looked during its period of significance, 1889-1905. Built in 1877, its historical integrity is maintained through its preserved exterior appearance, nearly intact original floor plan, and current operations as a museum actively educating visitors on the history of the legation.

Narrative Description

Location/Setting

The Old Korean Legation, located at 1500 13th Street Northwest, also known as 15 Logan Circle NW, stands in the northwest quadrant of Logan Circle in Washington D.C. The building's front facade faces east overlooking 13th Street as it merges into Logan Circle. A semicircular paved walkway guides visitors toward the entrance which is shaded by a steel porte-cochère on concrete piers; it historically served as the porte-cochère for carriage and wagons.¹ A 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. Trees line the south and north edges of the east lawn. A paved one-car driveway, added post-1905, runs adjacent to the north edge of the lawn. Between 13th Street and P Street along Logan Circle, the Old Korean Legation is one of a dozen Victorian-era buildings. The structure's west wall abuts the neighboring residence, 14 Logan Circle. The property originally served as a single-family home until its conversion into a diplomatic residence and office in 1889.

The Old Korean Legation is part of both the Logan Circle Historic District and the Greater Fourteenth Street Historic District. Logan Circle, part of L'Enfant's 1791 city design, 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. Lot 74 was part of the housing development the neighborhood experienced between 1874 and 1887 as a result of spending on such infrastructure. This period coincided with the increasing popularity for romantic housing styles like Victorian Gothic, Second Empire, and Romanesque Revival.² The

¹ Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, *A Restoration report on the Old Korean Legation in Washington D.C.* (Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, 2019), 32.

² Logan Circle Community Association, D.C. Preservation League, Tracerics, 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

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houses constructed along Logan Circle are reflective of this trend, and nearly all are modeled in one these styles and are 3 to 4 stories tall with masonry walls.

Exterior

The Old Korean Legation building is a three-story, three-bay, double-pile, brick structure resting on a full English basement and designed in the Second Empire style. The structure is of pressed red brick laid in common bond, with a header course after each six courses of stretchers. Ohio sandstone was used for a water table and windowsills. A short mansard roof is covered with slate and crowned with a white-painted cast-iron cresting that terminates near exterior end chimneys. Two interior chimneys, hidden from public view, peek up from the west wall that abuts 14 Logan Circle. The trim color is now white, presumably a departure from the Victorian-era color.

East elevation

The front facade, or east elevation, faces 13th Street NW with symmetrical fenestration. A bracketed cornice with a wide frieze band adds dimension along the roof line. A central, tower-like pavilion projects from the façade with a pair of oval windows fitted into its projection of the mansard. Extending from the front elevation are a pair of two-story bay windows on either side of the central tower. Paired one-over-one double-hung, wooden sash windows with hooded molds and keystones can be found on each story of these projected components; the only exception being the first story of the projecting tower which contains the front entry door. The beige Ohio sandstone can be found in the windowsills and water table. Single one-over-one double-hung, sash windows fill each story of the north and south elevations of the bay windows. Mimicking the principal roof line, the two-story bay windows are capped by a bracketed cornice and low mansard roof with cast-iron cresting. Two evenly spaced one-over-one double-hung sash windows with the same hooded mold and key design are positioned on the third story above each bay window. The building is accessible via a front entrance positioned on the first floor of the central projecting tower. The door surround features a hooded mold and key design. The paired, one-light-and-two-panel entry doors (incorporating raised panels and bolection molds) admit light in through two small lights at its top. A heavy, balustered, cast-iron railing leads up the stone steps to the door beneath a modern, gabled, steel porte-cochère. The symbol on the *Taegeukgi*, or Korean flag, was incorporated into the porte-cochère's front pediment. Other design elements in the porte-cochère include circle cutouts along the fascia and arched brackets with geometrical patterns.

North elevation

The north elevation features a three-story three-sided projection or bay with an elaborate exterior end chimney running up its center and extending above the roof line. On each floor, flanking the chimney, are one-over-one double-hung, sash windows with a hooded mold and key matching the east elevation. The mansard roof line and cornice terminate with this three-story bay window. The remaining half of the building's north elevation is a simple brick exterior with symmetrical fenestration and a thin white frieze bordering the roof line. The roof line has a small step down

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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halfway through. For each story, there are two equally spaced, two-over-two double-hung sash windows with segmental arches. Like all the windows on this structure there is a vertical emphasis characteristic of the Italianate and Second Empire style.

South elevation

The south corner of the building is a tower-like semicircular projection. The mansard roof and cornice bend with its curve and then straightens out until abutting the neighboring structure, 14 Logan Circle. The roofline is interrupted by an exterior end chimney which runs down the center of the 3-story bow window. On either side of the chimney, running up each story are 1-over-1 double-hung, sash windows with a hooded mold and key. The straight segment of wall that continues from the 3-story bow window hosts a pair of 1-over-1 double-hung, sash windows at each story. A balcony partially conceals the windows on the second story and an enclosed greenhouse completely covers the first-floor windows. The wooden balcony and greenhouse give the impression of being one component because of their matching white paint and decorative details. The balcony's wide fascia features the same incised geometrical design as the brackets along the principal roof and are supported on simple wood pilasters. Directly beneath the balcony is the greenhouse. Brackets with matching geometric patterns on the greenhouse exterior appear as if they are holding up the balcony. A set of four elongated 1-over-1 double-hung, sash windows fill most of the greenhouse facade and are separated by pilasters of the same design as the balcony pilasters.

English basement

Single one-over-one double-hung, sash windows admit light into the legation's raised basement level. They are located directly beneath the sandstone belt course. The two-story bay windows each contain four of these windows, two facing east and one for each of the north and south directions. The south elevation hosts three English basement windows: two below the greenhouse and one east of the exterior end chimney. The final four windows are in the north elevation: two at the base of the three-story bay window and two immediately west of the bay window.

Interior

The former residence turned legation was built in a central hall plan with a stairwell along its west wall. Each room on the first and second floor has been decorated and staged to reflect the period of historical significance, 1889-1905. The third floor which served as sleeping quarters for legation staff was converted into an exhibit space during 2015-2018 restoration work.

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.³

³ Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, *A Restoration report on the Old Korean Legation in Washington D.C.* (Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, 2019), 36-39.

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First floor

The Old Korean Legation, like many Victorian homes of its time, utilized specialized interior spaces for private and public functions. The interior entryway is fitted with a shallow vestibule, one step below the first-floor level. A pair of wooden doors, with stained glass in the top half and a large transom light above, divide the vestibule from the interior hall. All first-floor rooms are accessible from the central hallway. The flower designs on the hallway carpet and wallpaper introduce visitors to a floral theme that is carried through the rest of the building. Large wooden sliding pocket doors control access to all four rooms from the central hallway. Fireplaces were the primary heating source, and each room has retained its original fireplace, mantle, and marbled flooring.

The first floor consisted of a parlor or receiving room, back parlor, greenhouse, dining room, butler's pantry with a dumbwaiter and sink, and a servant's water closet with a washstand and private stairwell. The back parlor served as a ceremonial room, called *jeongdang*. A service stairwell was built adjacent to the central hall stairs but hidden behind a shared wall. The dumbwaiter was removed and the butler's pantry now serves as an orientation room for tour programming.⁴

The rooms that look east onto 13th Street NW are *gaekdang*, the receiving room or front parlor, and *sikdang*, the dining room. West of the *gaekdang* is *jeongdang*, which is connected by a pair of sliding pocket doors. West of *sikdang* is the former butler's pantry and service closet which is connected by two single narrow wooden doors. A central staircase leads to the second and third floor.

Second floor

Privacy increased with each level or story. The second floor consisted of two offices, a master bedroom, library, two bathrooms, and a balcony. The master bedroom sits directly above the reception or front parlor. West of the bedroom is the minister's office which is accessible through a shared wood paneled door. The office windows slide vertically up and 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

In 1900, the third floor housed three rooms for legation staff and a bathroom with a washstand, spigot, and bathtub.⁵ Sometime between October 1943 and December 1958, when the property served as an office to the Teamsters Local No. 639, the third story was renovated, losing its historical form.⁶ The union did, however, preserve the third story circular skylight located above the stairwell. Currently, the third level serves as an exhibit space.

⁴ Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, 36.

⁵ Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, 36.

⁶ Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, 32; District of Columbia Land Records, Deed Book 11180, 533.

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Style

The interior of the Old Korean Legation originally reflected an Eastlake style popularized by the late nineteenth-century Aesthetic Home Art Movement inspired, in part, by East Asian motifs. The building underwent several interior remodelings over the years prior to the Korean government's restoration after 2012. The overall structural integrity and layout of the interior, however, was largely preserved.

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. This era saw an increasing rejection for the overly stylized and called for a return to more simplified and accessible designs, like Gothic. Architectural and design writers like Charles L. Eastlake, author of *Hints on Household Taste*, saw the need for literature that educated 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.⁷ As popularized by manufacturers, the Eastlake name came to broadly refer to oak, walnut, and ebonized furniture with spindle, chamfering, and incised geometrical decoration.⁸ *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 1872.⁹ The following year, Seth Phelps purchased lot 74 of square 241, and soon began work on his home.

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

Stained glass brought color and warmth through the legation's vestibule doors. A guest's first impression began at the entrance, according to nineteenth-century design literature, so a home should imbue a welcoming environment through the use of warm lighting.¹⁰ It was also maintained that tastefully designed interiors exercise a three-part horizontal division through use of moldings, contrasting wall patterns, wainscoting, and cornice treatment.¹¹ This stylistic exercise is also known as frieze-filling-dado.¹² Additional design elements for a proper home included parquet hardwood flooring with dark trim, antique furniture, and lightly decorated ceilings.¹³ Based on the function of each room, the color palette should reflect the use and activities. For instance, acceptable colors for dining rooms were shades of red, brown, green, or terra cotta. Drawing rooms only ever looked beautiful with lighter tones to emphasize the

⁷ 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.

⁸ Joanna Banham, *Victorian Interior Design* (New York: Crescent Books, 1991), 77-78.

⁹ McClaugherty, 3.

¹⁰ McClaugherty, 17.

¹¹ McClaugherty, 10.

¹² Banham, 126.

¹³ McClaugherty, 10.

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feminine nature of its primary occupants, women. Bedrooms that received lots of sun could get away with cool tones but otherwise it was best to stick with warmer shades.¹⁴

The *gaekdang*, or reception room for greeting guests, is the first room left of the entrance. Set against the backdrop of a sage green floral wallpaper, mismatched antique furniture is now thoughtfully arranged to mimic the 1893 interior photo from the *Demorest Family Magazine*. Portraits of the legation officers are displayed on side tables and the fireplace mantel. Following the three-part horizontal emphasis, white molding and a contrasting wallpaper border partitions the wall along three horizontal layers. Dark wood trim frames the doorways and a low-hanging chandelier reflects light against a white marbled ceiling.

Unlike the reception room, which was considered a female space and hence the only acceptable place for portraits and light colors, the dining room presents a more masculine feel through shades of red, brown, green, or terra cotta.¹⁵ *Jeongdang*, the ceremonial space for bowing toward the Korean palace, shared the same wallpaper as the *gaekdang*.

The *sikdang*, the dining room, was lined with red wallpaper that had a contrasting border featuring leaf and floral elements in purple, yellow, and green tones. Dark wood trim, with simply designed cabinet and table pieces grounded the room. A hearth along the north wall was hidden behind an ornamental partition but likely served as a central fixture to the room in cooler seasons.

Alterations

The Korean Legation erected a porte-cochère for the entrance in 1891. It was removed during the tenure of the National Council of Negro Women sometime between 1959 and 1981, only to be reconstructed by the Korean government in 2018. Reconstruction was made possible using an 1893 photograph.¹⁶ It was also learned that architect Thomas M. Plowman, also built the neighboring residence, 1502 13th Street, whose porte-cochère survived. This provided important design and structural clues for reconstruction. The Korean flag's central symbol was incorporated into the gable.¹⁷

An 1898 fire, originating in a defective chimney flue, gutted a third-floor quarters of the first secretary.¹⁸ This required extensive repairs. The same third-floor spaces were 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. When the building was again a home, the basement was reconfigured to provide a bedroom, probably in the 1980s.

¹⁴ McClaugherty, 18-19.

¹⁵ McClaugherty, 18-19.

¹⁶ Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, 329.

¹⁷ Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, 44.

¹⁸ "Fire at the Korean Legation," *The Times*, April 9, 1898.

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A Korean garden and *bullomun* was added during the final year of restoration. A *bullomun*, or gate of eternal youth, was installed on the property's north lawn, and visitors must pass beneath it to enter the garden. The stone gate symbolizes a desire to perpetuate strong Korean-American relations.¹⁹

¹⁹ Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, 319.

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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

1877

1889

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 as 15 Logan Circle NW during the 1960s and 1970s), is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage: Asian and Politics/Government. The former legation building is historically significant for housing Korea's first permanent diplomatic mission to the United States and for its association with Korea's nation-building efforts in the late nineteenth century and its independence efforts in the twentieth century.

The period of significance is defined by the years the property served as the Korean Legation, 1889-1905. The legation in the United States was forced to close its doors in 1905 after the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1905. Also known as the Eulsa Treaty, it was signed by Korea under military and political duress, and the country became a protectorate and colony of Japan until the end of World War II.

The building serves as a symbol to Korean and Korean Americans in their long battle for the peninsula's recognition as a sovereign, independent nation. It is connected to several figures prominent in the independence movement. It also illustrates the beginnings of Korean immigration to and educational, scientific and literary achievement in the United States.

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The Old Korean Legation is also a unique example of a tangible space associated with members of a minority community, because of its prominence, its preservation, and its interpretation. Many properties connected to the histories of underrepresented groups no longer exist. To have a prominent, architecturally designed space occupied historically by persons of color is relatively rare in the United States and notable even if it is not being nominated under Criterion C.

In 1972, the former legation was recognized as a property contributing to the character of the Logan Circle Historic District and, in 1994, as a contributing property in the Greater Fourteenth Street Historic District.

Narrative Statement of Significance

The property's historic association and involvement in the first two decades of Korea-U.S. diplomacy qualifies it for Criterion A under the areas of 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, 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.²⁰ 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

²⁰ Mike Mansfield, "American diplomatic relations with Korea (1866-1910)," master's thesis, (University of Montana, 1934), 3-4.

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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.²¹

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 American vessels and crews.²² 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.²³ 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.

Korea sent its first permanent diplomatic envoy to the United States in late 1887. Park Jeong-yang (Park Chung Yang) bore the official title of envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary. He was supported by legation officials such as Yi Wan-yong, counselor; Yi Chae-yeon (Yi Tsai-yon), translator; Yi Ha-young, secretary; and Yi Sang-jae, assistant secretary. 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.²⁴

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.²⁵ 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.

²¹ Mansfield, 10-13.

²² Mansfield, 21-22.

²³ Mansfield, 25.

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ "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.

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*Park Jeong-yang, first Korean
minister to the United States.
Collection of Old Korean Legation
Museum.*

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.²⁶ The Korean Legation arrived in Washington, D.C., on January 9, 1888, and presented its credentials to the president unaccompanied by Chinese diplomats.²⁷ China demanded Korea punish Minister Park for his defiance. Minister Park soon returned to

²⁶ Mansfield, 42.

²⁷ Lee, 19-20.

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Korea because of ill health, but instead of receiving discipline for his actions, he was promoted to chief advisor and, later, to the positions of minister of justice and minister of finance.²⁸ The legation had become an instrument in and symbol of Korea's fight for recognition as an independent state.



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

²⁸ Lee, 23-24.

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A Korean Legation property

Korea's legation was first housed at 1513 O Street NW as of January 18, 1888.²⁹ 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, 1889.³⁰

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 74.³¹ 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, but 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.³²

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 1885.³³ 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.³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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 \$25,000.³⁶

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

²⁹ Lee, 20.

³⁰ "Social Matters: What is Going on in Fashionable Society-Personal Notes," *The Evening Star*, February 14, 1889.

³¹ 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.

³² U.S. Bureau of the Census. Tenth Decennial Census. Population Schedules for the District of Columbia. 1880.

³³ "The Late Capt. S.L. Phelps," *The Evening Star*, June 25, 1885.

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ Lee, 19.

³⁶ Phelps v. Browns, et al.; District of Columbia Land Records, Deed Book 1617, 495.

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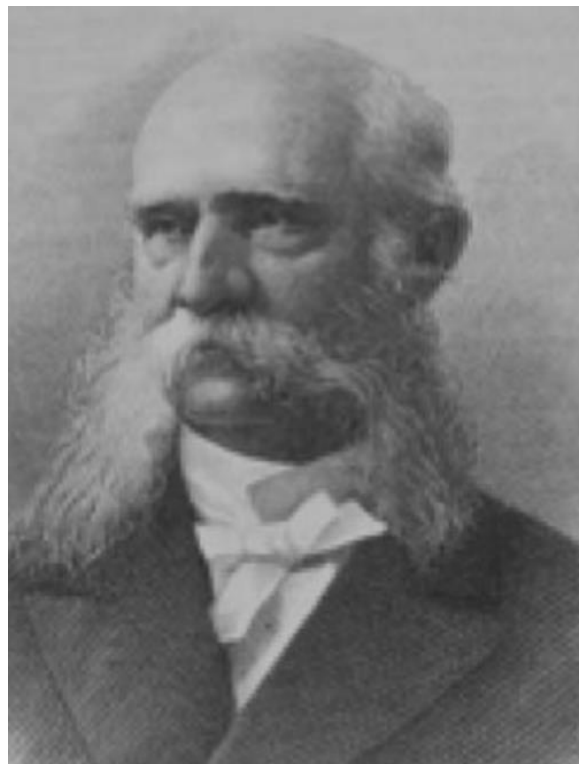
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dining hall, will be completed, as well as the enlarging of the upper chambers through the pulling down of the partition walls.... These important changes will be followed by a thorough refurnishing and fresh interior decorations. With this view the 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...³⁷

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.³⁸

Seth Ledyard Phelps, 1824-1885.
<https://www.findagrve.com/memorial/37224690/seth-ledyard-phelps>



³⁷ "The Korean Legation" *The Evening Star*, July 4, 1891.

³⁸ "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. Collection of the Old Korean Legation Museum.
Below: 4-8 Logan Circle Northwest, 1971. Logan Circle Historic District National Register nomination. Photographer: Fred Figall.*



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Legation interiors.
Top: The parlor. The Puritan, November 1897.
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 1882, Heungseon Daewongun (or Yi Ha-ung, Prince Gung) "prince of the great court" led a revolt to reclaim the power of the monarchy from foreign influence. The Japanese legation was burned, and the prince was exiled to China. Two years later, a progressive 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 of 1894, Japan and China declared war. Recognizing an opportunity and the greater strength of Japan, Korea signed a treaty of alliance with the Japan that recognized Korea's independence. 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 independence.

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, 1910.³⁹ 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 \$5.⁴⁰ The same day, Uchida sold the former legation to U.S. citizen Horace K. Fulton.⁴¹ It would be another 102 years before the property's ownership was returned to Korea, or what is now South 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.



*Then-Secretary Yi Chae-yeon, wife and staff at Mount Vernon, May 6, 1889.
Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of of George Washington at Mount Vernon.*

³⁹ Mansfield, 73-74.

⁴⁰ District of Columbia Land Records, Deed Book 3358, 94.

⁴¹ 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.⁴² *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.⁴³

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 1883 Korean mission. The papers complimented Lady Yi’s “elegant hanboks, her classy but friendly manner, and her outgoing personality.”⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ Washingtonians mourned with the Yis.



Above: Headstone of infant Yi Hwason. Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation, Old Korean Legation in Washington D.C.: The Symbol of Diplomatic Sovereignty and Korea-US Friendship.

⁴² “Royal College Student,” *The Washington Post*, September 30, 1901.

⁴³ Catherine Frances Cavanagh, “The Korean Legation,” *The Puritan*, November 1897, 38.

⁴⁴ “Corean Minister Going,” *The New York Daily Tribune*, February 4, 1900.

⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ The legation took on George Washington University president and attorney Dr. Charles W. Needham as “official chaperon” or protocol officer in 1901.⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹ 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.⁵² He held a membership in the new National Geographic Society and assisted Smithsonian curators labeling Korean collections in the late 1890s. He wrote 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 the *American Anthropologist* in 1899.⁵³ The Korean ministers regularly attended Roanoke College commencement ceremonies.⁵⁴ In 1897, Minister Seo

⁴⁶ 박정양(Park Jeong-yang), *미행일기(美行日記/Mihaengilgi/Journals on Trip to the US)*, manuscript, after 1889.

⁴⁷ “Seven Koreans at Howard,” *The Washington Post*, May 8, 1896, 2.

⁴⁸ 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.

⁴⁹ “Diplomatic Pilots,” *The Evening Star*, March 11, 1905.

⁵⁰ J. Dreher, “Koreans in America,” *The Boston Evening Transcript*, March 26, 1904.

⁵¹ 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>.

⁵² *The Roanoke Collegian*, Vol. 20, No. 8 (June 1894), 65.

⁵³ “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.

⁵⁴ Five ministers attended graduations: Park Yong-gyu, Suh Gwang-beom, Yi Beom-jin, Yi Eui-dam, and Cho Min-hui.

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Gwang-beom was presented an honorary master of arts degree.⁵⁵ Alumni remember the Korean graduates, particularly commemorating Kim Kyu-sik with a historic marker in 2022.⁵⁶



Jong Sik Ahn, He Chul Ye, Kwe P. Im, Bum Soo Ye, Biung H. Yur, Seek H. Kim, Kim Ha, and Nansa, 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. For example, Syngman Rhee (1875-1965), the future first president of the Republic of Korea, left his homeland for the U.S. in 1904, after serving an eight-year prison sentence for anti-colonial agitation. He headed directly to Washington to present Korea's case to President Roosevelt, who was negotiating the Portsmouth Treaty to end of Russo-Japanese War. Rhee met first with the Korean Legation before seeking audience with members of Congress, cabinet members, and President Roosevelt himself.⁵⁷ Supported by a ministerial scholarship, Rhee earned his

⁵⁵ Julius Daniel Drescher, "Koreans in America," *Roanoke Collegian*, March 26, 1904.

⁵⁶ "Historical marker to Korean independence leader dedicated at Roanoke College," *The Cardinal News*, March 31, 2022.

⁵⁷ Lew Yōng-ik Lew, *The Making of the First Korean President: Syngman Rhee's Quest for Independence, 1875-1948* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2017).

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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—including several years out of an office he established in D.C. In 1948, he was elected as president of South Korea. Rhee lived much of his life in the United States—in Hawai`i and D.C. The relationships he established in the 1920s and 1930s gave rise to institutions, specifically churches, that continue to serve Korean American communities in both Hawai`i and in the Washington metropolitan area today.



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.

Seo Jae-Pil or Phillip 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. He also came to Washington in the 1880s as an exile, 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 wife sheltered in the third-floor living quarters of the legation for

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several months prior to their return to Korea in late 1895.⁵⁸ There, Jaisohn published a pro-independence newspaper, until it was shut down by the Japanese. In 1898, he returned to the U.S. after his independence activities were shut down by the Japanese government. He and his family would settle permanently in Pennsylvania. In 1919, he and Rhee established a base for the independence movement organizing and fundraising in Washington, D.C., mostly operating under the name the Korean Commission. 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.

Seo Gwang-beom⁵⁹ (1859-1897) came to the District of Columbia in 1883 as a recording 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 by 1887. 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.⁶⁰ 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 1897.⁶¹ These wax cylinders are the oldest known recordings of Korean music and are archived at the Library of Congress.⁶² 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 in the government. A pro-Japanese faction fell out of favor after the assassination of Queen Min, and Seo was appointed minister to the U.S. Serving only January to June 1896, he was unseated by

⁵⁸ 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.

⁵⁹ 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.

⁶⁰ 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.

⁶¹ Anna Tolman Smith, "Some Nursery Rhymes of Korea," *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 10, No. 38 (July-September 1897), 181-186.

⁶² 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).

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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.⁶³ 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, 1897.⁶⁴

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 the U.S. Congress."⁶⁵ 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.

The Legation as symbol and as a home again

For a time, the shuttered legation was a rallying point, representing the hope that it would one day represent a free Korea. At some point, postcards were produced that depict the legation building flying the Korean flag (*Taegeukgi*). These were reportedly circulated among the diaspora as an assertion of national independence. 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."⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁷

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 headquarters for Local 639 of the Teamsters Union.⁶⁸ It was later an office of the National Council of Negro Women.⁶⁹ Returning to residential use in 1977—with proceeds of the sale to

⁶³ "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.

⁶⁴ "Pom Kwang Soh Dead," *The Sun*, August 14, 1897.

⁶⁵ *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.

⁶⁶ "Sale Of Legation Is Opposed By Koreans," *The Evening Star*, September 30, 1910.

⁶⁷ 1882 Foundation, *D.C. Asian American Context Statement*.

⁶⁸ "Union Denied Right To Occupy Property At 1500 13th Street," *The Evening Star*, March 24, 1945.

⁶⁹ 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.

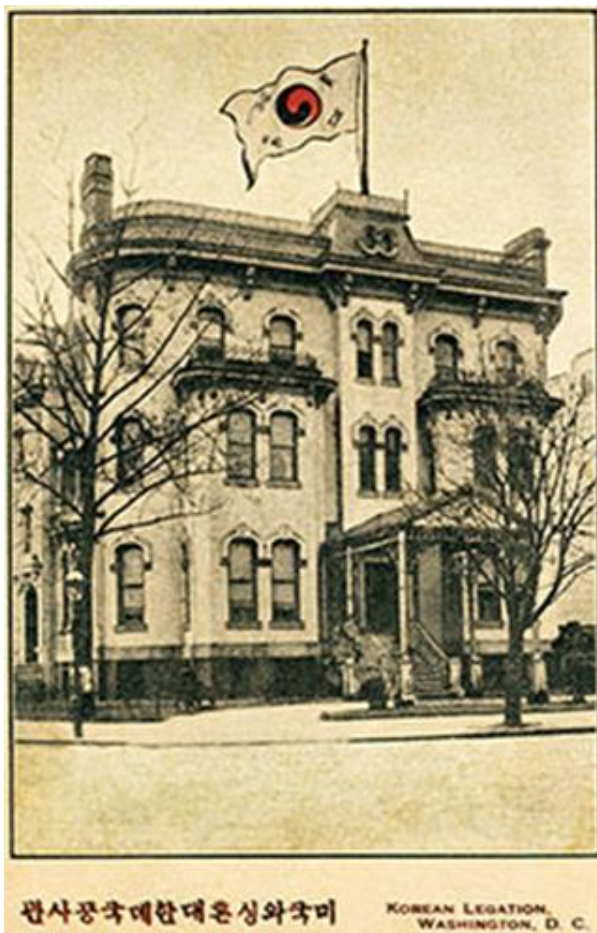
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benefit the Logan Circle Community Association—it was finally purchased October 18, 2012 by the Republic of Korea, with the intention of making it a museum to commemorate the country's legation.⁷⁰



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 Old Korean Legation Museum.

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

⁷⁰ "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 |

Integrity

The Old Korean Legation Building maintains high historic integrity through its location, setting, design, materials, feeling, and association. Since its 1877 construction, the building has been a fixture at the corner of Logan Circle’s northwest quadrant. In turn, the surrounding high-Victorian residences greatly contribute to the setting of 1500 13th Street NW. The edifice’s Second Empire design with Eastlake influence is well preserved. The major change to the exterior’s front occurred during the Korean Legation’s residency when a porte-cochère was built on the 13th Street side in 1891.⁷¹ While this was removed after 1959, it has recently been reconstructed in spirit, part of a 2015-2019 restoration. The property’s original design elements and structure provide a high level of integrity of design and materials.

Restoration work conducted by Korea’s Cultural Heritage Administration was intended to return the Old Korean Legation to an interpretive period reflecting its use by the Korean Legation, 1889 to 1905. Later paint was removed, the exterior walls were repointed, roof repairs were made, as were updates to bring the building up to code.⁷² Interior restoration for interior design relied on

⁷¹ Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, 32.

⁷² Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, 43-44.

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historical documentation from newspapers, photographs, and inventory records begun for insurance purposes after the 1898 fire. The third floor could not be saved, due to renovations in the mid-twentieth century when it served as headquarters for the Drivers, Chauffeurs, and Helpers Local Union No. 639, but it contributes to the retelling of the historic space through its function as an exhibit hall. Grounded in historical research, the building's exterior and interior condition conveys the feeling and association of its historic role as the Korean Legation.

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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

Verbal Boundary Description

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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. See 1878 plat, Map 3.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries are the original boundaries of the lot (74) occupied by the legation and the Phelps residence.

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:

Map 1: Location of 1500 13th Street NW.

Map 2: District of Columbia zoning map showing location of 1500 13th Street NW.

Map 3: Detail of an 1878 subdivision plat showing Lot 74 in Square 241.

Map 4: Old Korean Legation, plan of the first floor.

Map 5: Old Korean Legation, plan of the second floor.

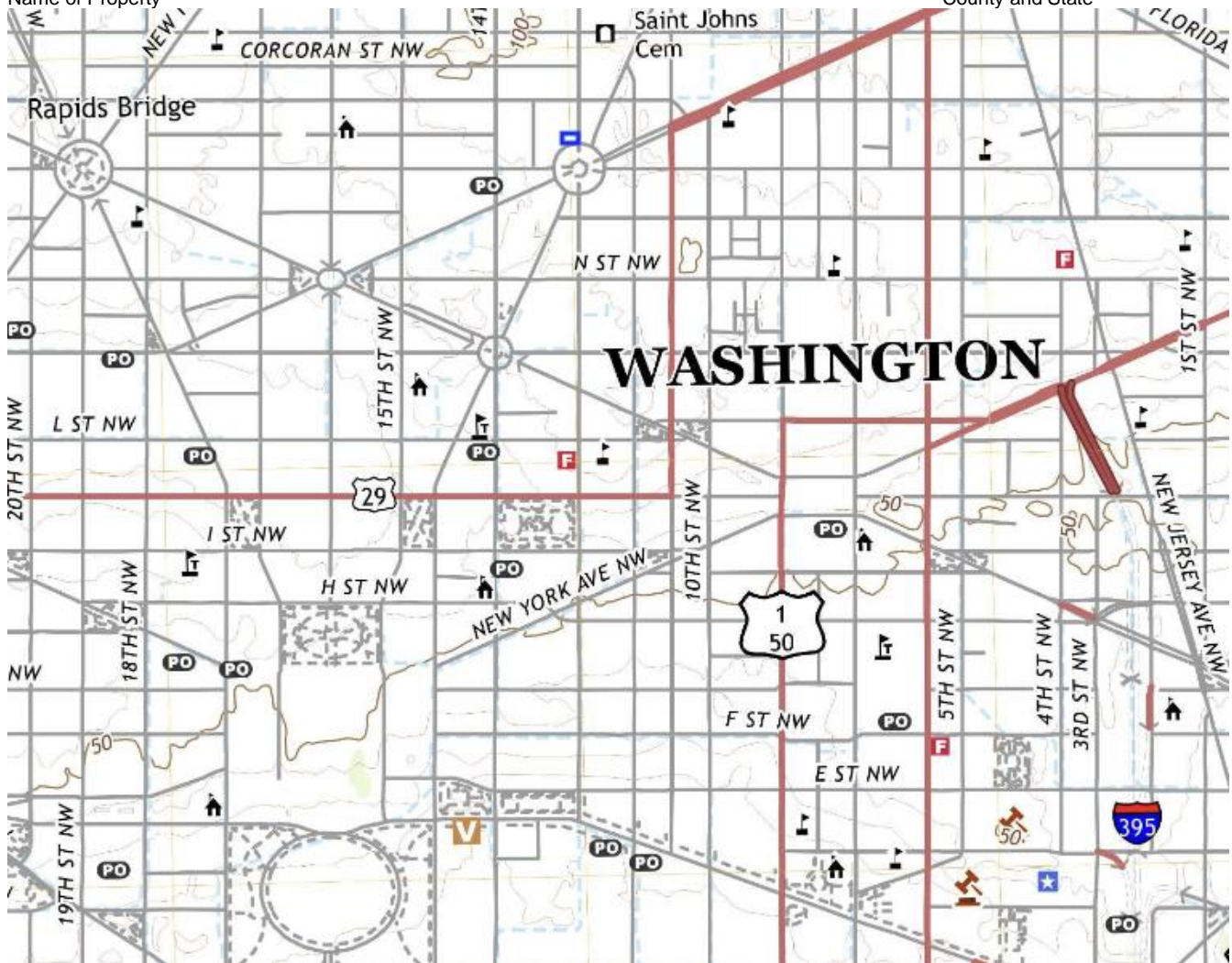
Map 6: Old Korean Legation, plan of the third floor.

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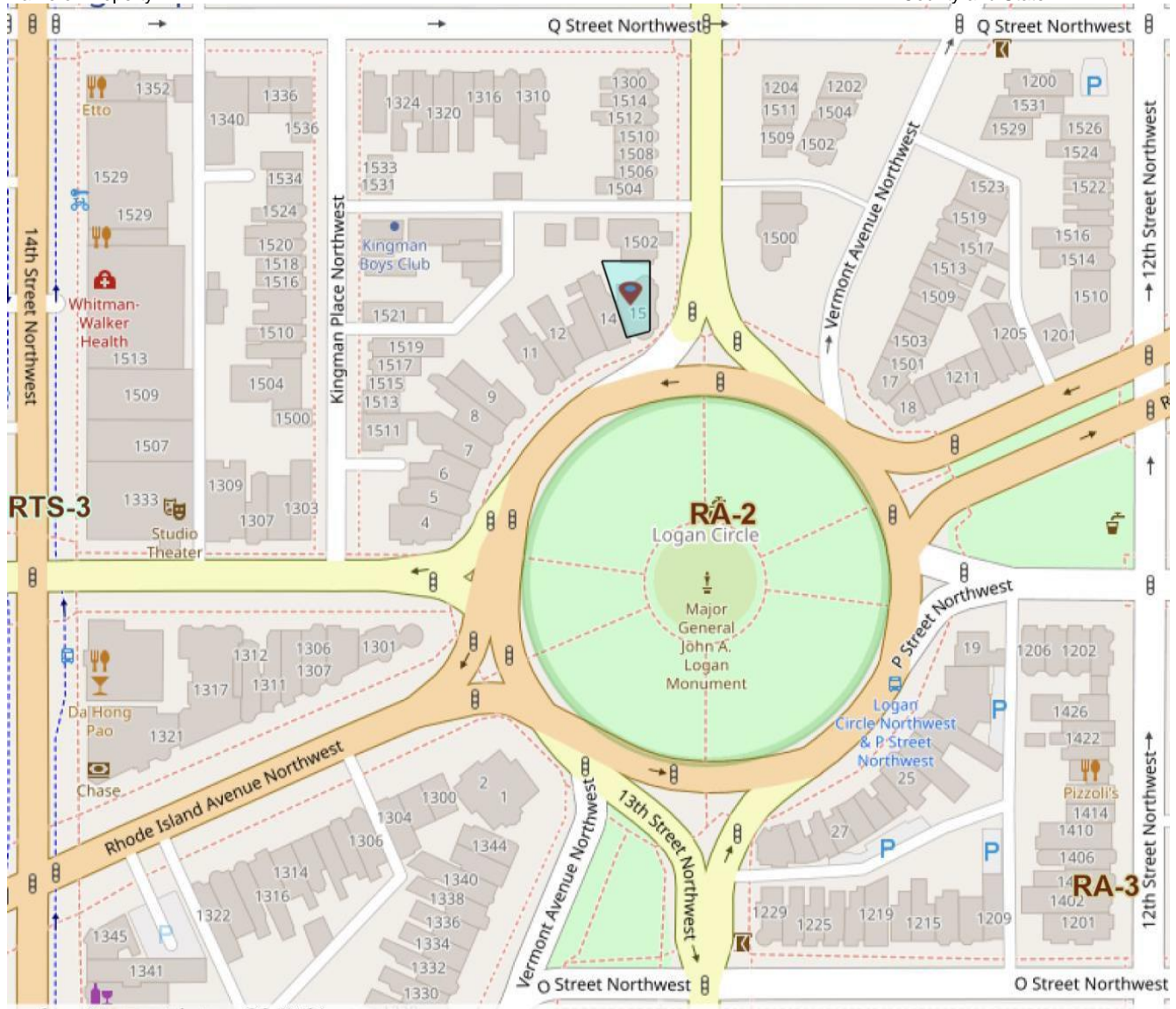
Map 1: Location of 1500 13th Street NW, depicted in blue.
USGS Topographic Map, Washington West, D.C.–MD.–VA. Quadrangle, 2019.

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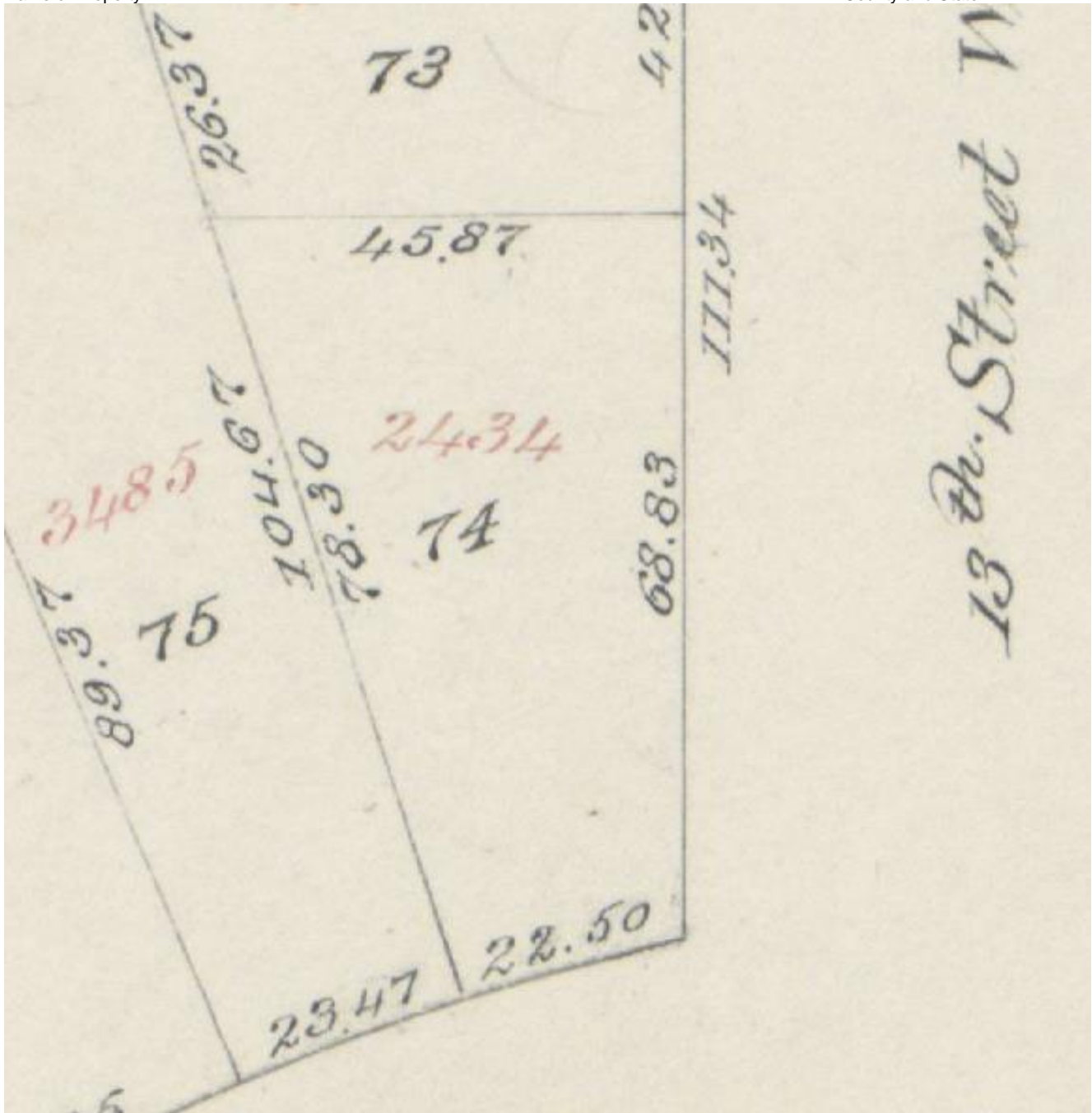
County and State



Map 2: District of Columbia zoning map showing location of 1500 13th Street NW shaded.

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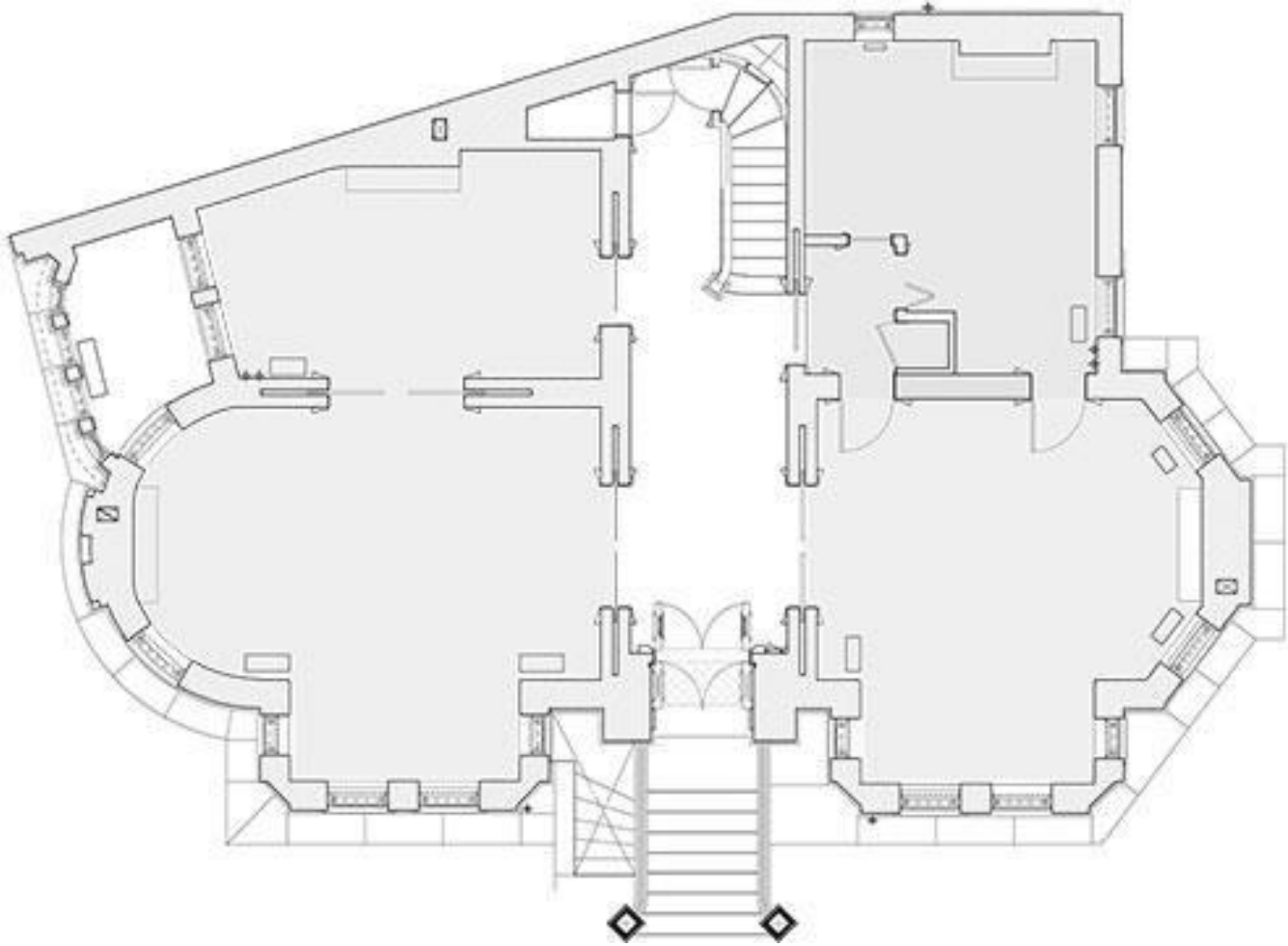
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Map 3: Detail of an 1878 subdivision plat showing the present lot.
District of Columbia Office of the Surveyor, Subdivision Book JHK, page 301.

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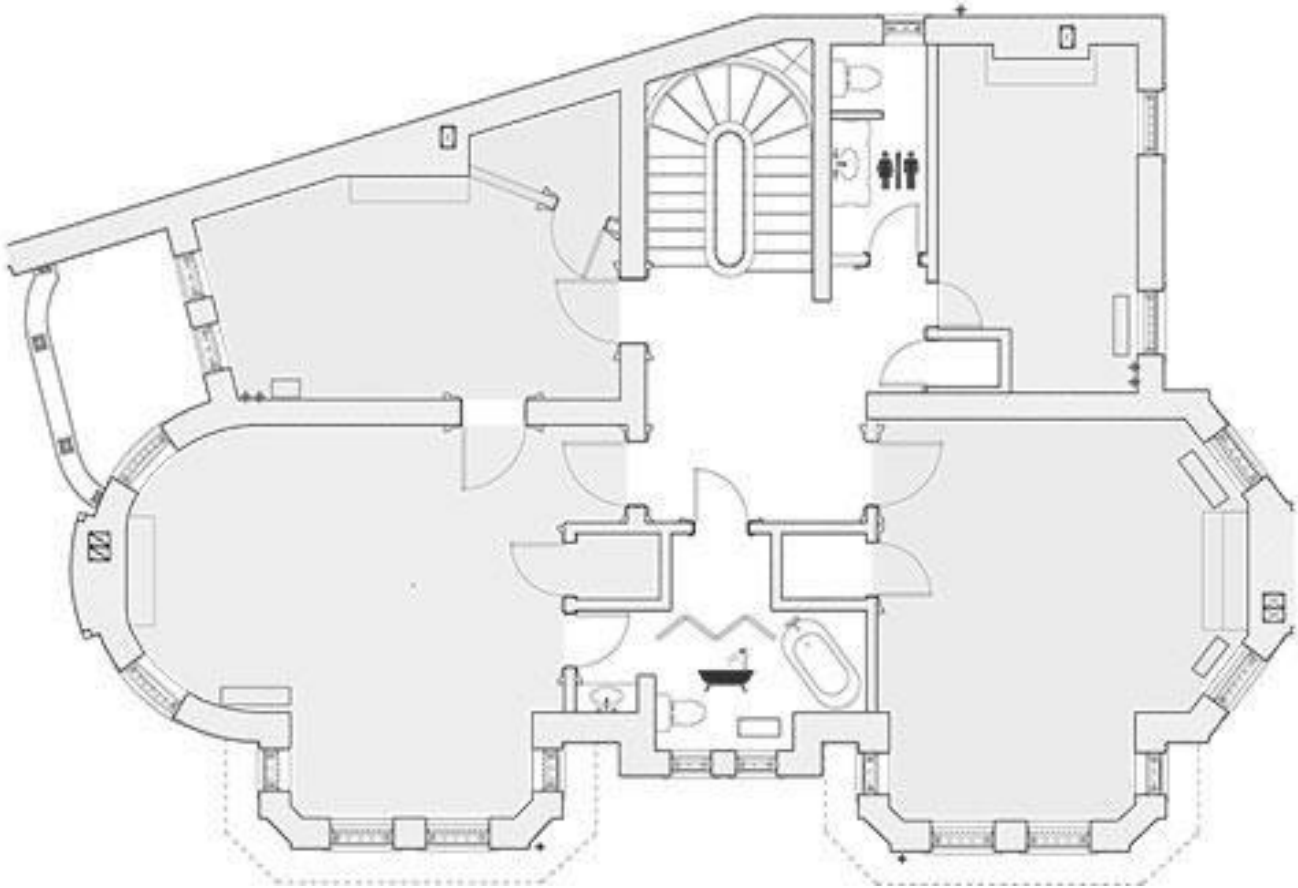
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Map 4: Plan of the first floor.

Old Korean Legation
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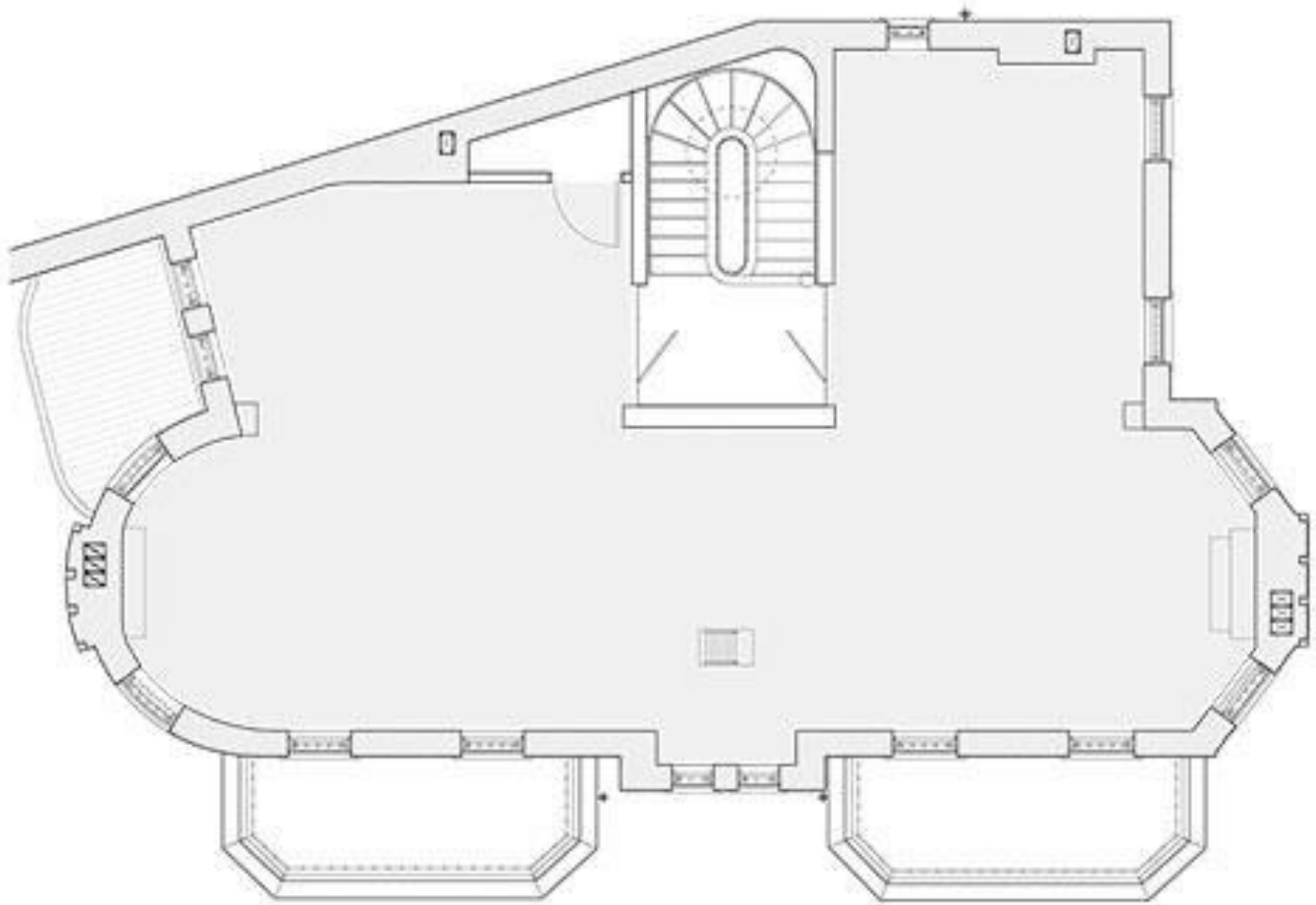
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Map 5: Plan of the second floor.

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Map 6: Plan of the third 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: Emma Lucier-Keller, unless otherwise stated.

Date Photographed: 2022-2023

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

| | |
|----------|---|
| 1 of 20 | Aerial view of Logan Circle, date unknown. Photo by Carol M. Highsmith. |
| 2 of 20 | Old Korean Legation, east (front) elevation. |
| 3 of 20 | Old Korean Legation, south elevation. |
| 4 of 20 | Old Korean Legation, north elevation. |
| 5 of 20 | Old Korean Legation, Eastlake-style cornice bracket. |
| 6 of 20 | Old Korean Legation, porte-cochère. |
| 7 of 20 | 1507 13 th Street NW porte-cochère. |
| 8 of 20 | Old Korean Legation, entry vestibule. |
| 9 of 20 | Old Korean Legation, first floor interior, <i>gaekdang</i> or front parlor, looking south. |
| 10 of 20 | Old Korean Legation, first floor interior, <i>sikdang</i> or dining room. looking north. |
| 11 of 20 | Old Korean Legation, first floor interior, <i>jeongdang</i> or back parlor, looking south. |
| 12 of 20 | Old Korean Legation, first floor interior, former servants' quarters and butler's pantry, now an orientation room, looking south. Ghost of former servants' stair exposed during restoration. |
| 13 of 20 | Old Korean Legation, second floor interior, Staff Legation Office, looking north. |
| 14 of 20 | Old Korean Legation, second floor interior, Minister's Office, looking south. |

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|----------|--|
| 15 of 20 | Old Korean Legation, second floor interior, library, looking west. |
| 16 of 20 | Old Korean Legation, second floor interior, master bedroom, looking south. |
| 17 of 20 | Old Korean Legation, third floor interior, exhibit hall looking west, formerly servant and staff's quarters. |
| 18 of 20 | Old Korean Legation, pocket door. |
| 19 of 20 | Old Korean Legation, pocket door hardware. |
| 20 of 20 | Old Korean Legation, bullomun gate in garden, looking west. |



Photo 1: Aerial view of Logan Circle, date unknown. Photographer: Carol M. Highsmith.

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Photo 2: East (front) elevation.

Old Korean Legation
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Photo 3: South elevation.

Old Korean Legation
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Photo 4: North elevation.

Old Korean Legation
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Photo 5: Eastlake-style cornice bracket.

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Photo 6: Porte-cochère.

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Photo 7: Porte-cochère at 1507 13th Street NW.

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Photo 8: Entry vestibule.

Old Korean Legation
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Photo 9: First floor interior, *gaekdang* or front parlor, looking south.

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Photo 10: First floor interior, *sikdang* or dining room, looking north.

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Photo11: First floor interior, *jeongdang* or back parlor, looking south.

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Photo 12: First floor interior, former servants' quarters and butler's pantry, now an orientation room, looking south. Ghost of former servants' stair exposed during restoration.

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Photo 13: Second floor interior, Staff Legation Office, looking north.

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Photo 14: Second floor interior, Minister's Office, looking south.



Photo 15: Second floor interior, library, looking west.

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Photo 16: Second floor interior, master bedroom, looking south.

Old Korean Legation

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Photo 17: Third floor interior, exhibit hall looking west, formerly servant and staff's quarters.

Old Korean Legation
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Photo 18: Pocket door.

Old Korean Legation
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Photo 19: Pocket door hardware.

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Photo 20: *Bullomun* gate in garden, looking west.