

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

211

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.



### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Meridian Hill Historic District

Other names/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

### 2. Location

Street & number: 2201-2319 15th Street; 2400-2600 blocks of 15th and 16th Street; 2600-3000 blocks of 16th Street; 1600 block of Crescent Place, NW

City or town: Washington, D.C. 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Not For Publication:  Vicinity: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 X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following

level(s) of significance: \_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A X B X C X D

<u>DAVID MALONEY DC SHPO</u>	<u>APRIL 2, 2014</u>
Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
<u>DC HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE</u>	
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ 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:)

Patrick Andrews  
Signature of the Keeper

5/21/2014  
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>46</u>	<u>16</u>	buildings
<u>3</u>	<u>          </u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>          </u>	structures
<u>1</u>	<u>          </u>	objects
<u>51</u>	<u>16</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 12

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling/Multiple Dwelling

GOVERNMENT/Diplomatic Building

RELIGION/Religious Facility

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling/Multiple Dwelling

GOVERNMENT/Diplomatic Building

RELIGION/Religious Facility

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/Beaux Arts Classicism/Colonial Revival/Tudor Revival/Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival/Italian Renaissance/French Renaissance  
MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Deco

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Stone, Brick

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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#### Summary Paragraph

The Meridian Hill Historic District in Washington, D.C. is located on a significant rise of land in the northwest sector of the city and situated at the northern edge of the original city limits as laid out by Pierre L'Enfant in 1791. This land rise, geologically identified as the Wicomico-Sunderland escarpment, has a broad extent to the east and west of Meridian Hill that provided a clear and natural northern edge to the federal city. The escarpment is perceptible along the entire northwest sector of the city, but is more pronounced and stunning here as Meridian Hill is located due north of the White House with phenomenal views of it and beyond.

The Meridian Hill Historic District is generally bounded by V Street on the south, Irving Street on the north, 17<sup>th</sup> Street on the west and the rear of those properties fronting 15<sup>th</sup> Street on the east. The district includes, at its center, the grand neo-Classical Meridian Hill Park with an important array of grand Beaux Arts-style mansions, foreign legations, and large apartment buildings framing either side of it and extending further north. A clustering of imposing church edifices dominates the northern end of the district at 16<sup>th</sup> Street and Columbia Road, providing a visual "gateway" to the city from the north. At the same time, the steep rise of Meridian Hill at its southern end effectively pulls vehicles and pedestrians up the hill, past the walled garden, and out of the city proper.

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The historic district contains a total of 62 buildings, Reservations 327 (Meridian Hill Park), 309 B (including the Francis Asbury Memorial object), 309 C (Rabaut Park), 565 (triangular pocket park at 16<sup>th</sup> and Irving Streets), and one structure (Henderson Castle wall). Of these resources, 51 are contributing and 16 are non-contributing. Seventeen of them are D.C. Landmarks, and 12 of these 17 are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>1</sup> Meridian Hill Park is further designated a National Historic Landmark.

The Meridian Hill Historic District retains an extremely high quality of architectural design, materials and craftsmanship, and it retains a high degree of integrity. All but one of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century mansions survives intact with only minor or sympathetic alterations and few major additions. The apartment buildings and churches are all excellent examples of their style or period of construction and are important contributors to the historic district.

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### **Narrative Description**

Meridian Hill Park is the core of the historic district, spanning a full block between 15th and 16th Streets and stretching three blocks from W Street to Euclid Street. Its exposed aggregate concrete retaining wall rises an imposing thirty feet along 16th Street at the lower end of the park, at once beckoning and dismissing entry to its interior. Once inside the walls, the park opens itself to the visitor, offering formal terraces, statuary, a grand cascading waterfall and basin, and an upper esplanade with incomparable views of the city in the greatest European fashion.

Outside of these walls, the buildings of Meridian Hill can be neatly placed into three principal categories, with a few exceptions: grand beaux arts-style mansions that historically either served as private residences or foreign legations; luxury apartment buildings; and religious edifices. The large freestanding mansions are all executed in the Beaux Arts tradition, but offer an eclectic range of styles from the academically correct French Baroque Louis XIV style to the more informal Mediterranean Revival style. The apartment buildings are more varied in both form and style, and include the low-lying Arts & Crafts-inspired Meridian Hill Studio Apartments to the expansive eight-story, mid-century Modern Dorchester House Apartments. The five religious edifices in the district all embrace 20th-century Classical building traditions, but are all executed in a distinct and individualized manner.

A long stretch of a red Seneca sandstone wall that historically enclosed the now-demolished Henderson's Castle property is located along on the west side of 16th Street, across from Meridian Hill Park, and turns the corner along Florida Avenue and at Belmont Street. The wall extends from Florida Avenue to Belmont Street and includes the original towered and castellated entry gate to the mansion grounds, providing a visual reminder of the Victorian-era history of the site.

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<sup>1</sup> The following properties are listed in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites, but not the National Register: All Souls Unitarian Church, National Baptist Memorial Church, the Church of Jesus Christ LDS (Washington Chapel), the Italian Embassy, and the old French Embassy.

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Beaux Arts Mansions

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There are fifteen mansions on Meridian Hill. All of these mansions were designed in the period between 1905 and 1928 and either served as private residences or as the combined home and office of foreign governments. Of these fifteen mansions, eight were designed by the notable local architect George Oakley Totten, Jr. for his patron, Mary Foote Henderson (and her husband, John Henderson) occupant of Henderson's Castle (see Section 8). Others were designed by nationally and locally known architects, namely John Russell Pope, Nathan Wyeth, and Warren & Wetmore, Architects. Many of the mansions served as foreign legations with both residential and official functions. They are all of a certain scale, designed with large reception areas, ballrooms and/or music rooms, and living and dining rooms, and all are lavishly appointed on the interior. These mansions line the avenue, but are somewhat clustered, with a group of five located on the west side of 16th Street above Euclid Street and a collection of three located on the east side of 15th Street south of Euclid Street, directly across from the upper terrace of Meridian Hill Park. Two of the private mansions, the White-Meyer House and Meridian House, are located on the curving Crescent Place, off of 16th Street. Currently, eight of these mansions are listed in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites and six are listed in the National Register. All of the mansions are important buildings and each deserves recognition in its own right, above and beyond inclusion in this historic district.

The White-Meyer House and Meridian House, located at the southern end of the historic district, are the most private of the area's mansions. Both houses, designed by John Russell Pope a decade apart from each other, occupy large lots and are enclosed by walls that obscure the houses from public view and contribute to an elite enclave-like feeling of Sixteenth Street in general and Crescent Place in particular. The two-story, five-bay brick White-Meyer House, built in 1912 for retired diplomat Henry White and his wife, is stylistically reminiscent of an English Georgian country house. Indeed, the extravagant interior detailing includes some original Georgian-era mantels brought over from England.

Meridian House, commissioned by Irwin Boyle Laughlin, steel magnate and a friend of Henry White who built the White-Meyer House, was erected almost ten years later, just east of the White-Meyer House. The Meridian House property extends west to 17th Street and south to Belmont Place and is enclosed by high concrete walls with limestone facing. Hiding behind these walls is the limestone-clad French neo-Classical manse that appears to rise only two stories, but actually has four, including a sunken basement level of services and an attic-level servants' quarters within the mansard roof. Built into the natural rise of the terrain, both the White-Meyer and Meridian houses enjoy landscaped gardens at the rear with exceptional panoramic views of the city to the south that historically would also have included a view of the Henderson's residence.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This grandiose late Victorian mansion, built in 1888 by John and Mary Henderson, later became known as Henderson's Castle. Demolished in 1949, the estate's castellated entry gate and perimeter wall are all that remain of the property today.

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North of the Crescent Place houses on the west side of 16th Street as it plateaus, and interspersed by several large apartment buildings, is 2640 16th Street, the southern-most of Mary Henderson's Sixteenth Street mansions designed by George Oakley Totten, Jr. Now owned by a non-profit organization, this mansion was built in 1907 for use as the Embassy and Chancery of France. Totten thus chose to design the building in a distinctly French manner, namely in an academically correct interpretation of the Louis XIV style, a style associated with the great age of French political and artistic life of the late 17th and 18th centuries.<sup>3</sup> Considered one of Totten's finest works, this quintessential Beaux Arts mansion is characterized by its corner site and triangular location highlighted by the building's prominent domed tower, and by its classically arranged and richly detailed limestone façade, its mansard roof and iron roof cresting. For many years, and until 1941 when the expansive Dorchester House apartment building was constructed, the French Embassy stood somewhat isolated, with a large tract of undeveloped land separating it from the emerging group of mansions to the north.

North of the French Embassy is a collection of dwellings built by or inspired by Mary Henderson. These houses occupy the plateau of Meridian Hill and face east to Sixteenth Street. Each of the houses is illustrative of the Beaux Arts period of design and each is comparable in building scale, quality of materials and lavishness of design. However, Henderson and her architect adopted a variety of styles for the buildings, not only in an effort to create visual and didactic curb-appeal, but as illustrated with the French Embassy, to appeal to the prospective foreign tenants, or to perhaps even "seduce" certain favored nations to establish their legations on Meridian Hill.

The most stylistically distinct and the southernmost of the group of mansions, 2600 16th Street, has been known alternately throughout its history as the "Venetian Palace" for its Venetian Gothic style and the "Pink Palace" for its once pink-painted wall color. Constructed in 1905 and designed by Totten, it is the first of the Sixteenth Street mansions built by Mary Henderson in her effort to transform the street into an avenue of diplomatic residences. Despite being flanked by large-scale apartment buildings, the four-story palazzo is highly visible along Sixteenth Street and is notable for its Venetian Gothic/Renaissance-style articulation that is unique in the city and heavily adapted from the buildings found along Venice's Grand Canal. Like these houses, the palace is composed principally of flat surfaces with relief dependent upon shallow balconies (partly removed), and the carving out of the surfaces into open loggias (since enclosed). Similarly like its Venetian predecessors, the palace has marble and stucco wall surfaces pierced by Gothic arched windows with trefoil tracery and a low-pitched hipped roof sheathed with tiles. Although never occupied as an embassy, the house was home to several prominent persons including its first tenant, renowned statesman Oscar Strauss; its second tenant, Franklin MacVeagh, Secretary of Treasury in the Taft administration; and its second owner, wealthy Chicagoan Mrs. Marshall Field, who purchased the house from the Hendersons in 1914.

Next in line to the north is 2622 16th Street, initially built with 2620 16th Street as a duplex, but designed so as to appear as a single, large structure. Although only the northern section remains,

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<sup>3</sup> Pamela Scott and Antoinette Lee, *Buildings of the District of Columbia*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 308.

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the building stands out for its Spanish Baroque style of architecture not common in this city. This surviving half of the former duplex features a five-story tower thought to have been inspired by the Palace of Monterrey in Salamonca, Spain. Its walls are clad in smooth limestone with flamboyant applied terra cotta bas relief ornamentation reserved principally for the door and window surrounds and cornice cresting capped by an intricately carved limestone cornice with corner minarets and arched window openings in the upper two floors. The lower-level floors of the tower are separated by a broad stringcourse and have square-topped openings, while the entry floor repeats the round-arched openings of the upper levels. The southern half of the duplex, originally an imposing three-story and three-bay wide stone edifice with a broad tiled roof, was demolished circa 1965 and replaced with a buff brick apartment building typical of the period.<sup>4</sup> Mary Henderson built the duplex speculatively in 1908-1909, choosing the Spanish style, possibly in an effort to entice the Spanish government to move its legation here. The southern building in the duplex did house the Spanish Embassy for some time, while the northern and surviving duplex became home to the Danish legations. From 1926 until the present, the building at 2622 16th Street has served as the legation for the Republic of Lithuania.

The Cuban Embassy, located north of the duplex at 2630 16th Street, was constructed in 1916 by the Cuban government for use as its legation on a site purchased from the Hendersons. Although Mary Henderson had already designed a building for the site in an English Elizabethan style that would have furthered the eclecticism of the street, the Cubans instead built their own home in a neo-Classical style.<sup>5</sup> The Cuban government hired the local architecture firm of MacNeil and MacNeil to design its Beaux Arts mansion, stylistically justified by the then-ambassador who noted that “classicism belongs to the whole world, while the Spanish style is of only one nation.”<sup>6</sup> The Cuban Embassy is a three-story, five-bay limestone building with a recessed central section flanked by two semi-octagonal end bays. The first floor features a scored limestone base with emphasis placed on the center entry, while the two upper floors have a smooth ashlar finish with each bay given relatively equal architectural treatment. The two floors are united and the bays separated by double-story pilasters, and the cornice line capped by a parapet wall above a projecting cornice. The Cuban Embassy building holds the distinction of being the first purpose-built foreign legation on Meridian Hill built by a foreign government, rather than by Mary Henderson as part of her development venture.

The Embassy of Poland at 2640 16th Street was speculatively built in 1909-1910 by Mary Henderson and designed by George Oakley Totten, Jr. With no known tenant in mind, Totten again designed the mansion as an academic expression of a historic French style, in this case the more restrained Louis XVI style. After holding onto the house for ten years, Mary Henderson sold the building in 1919 to the Polish government, which has occupied the building as its embassy ever since. The limestone building stands 3-1/2-stories high and spans three equal bays, separated on the two upper floors at the center bay by double-height fluted pilasters and

<sup>4</sup> Before it was demolished and replaced by the present non-contributing apartment building on the site, the mansion at 2620 16th Street served first as the Swedish Embassy, and then as the Spanish Embassy. In the early 1930s it was the Persian Legation, then it became a nightclub, and later a guest house.

<sup>5</sup> A drawing of the Elizabethan-style house designed by Totten for Mary Henderson is shown in “Home for a Diplomat: Addition to Handsome Group on Sixteenth Street Hill,” *The Washington Post*, April 11, 1909

<sup>6</sup> “Cuban Legation Home: Style to be Louis Quinze,” *The Washington Post*, November 19, 1916, p. R2.



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articulated at the corners by stone quoining. The building is covered by a Mansard roof, clad in slate with copper seams, and features round-arched dormer windows on all four sides giving light to the fourth-floor servants' quarters.

On the north side of Fuller Street and completing the group of five limestone mansions on the west side of 16th Street is the very Italian, Italian Embassy building at 2700 16th Street, built in 1924 on land purchased in part from the Hendersons. Gelasio Caetani, the Italian ambassador at the time was a trained architect and reputedly heavily involved in the design process, though the notable New York architecture firm Warren & Wetmore were the architects of record, with Whiting Warren chiefly responsible for the building. Not surprisingly, the architects designed the embassy in an Italian Renaissance Palazzo mode with direct references to the Palazzo Farnese in Rome. The three-story, five-bay building is divided horizontally into a rusticated ground floor with emphasis placed on the central entry; a principal piano nobile with pedimented windows; and an attic level of small square windows, all covered by a low hipped red tile roof. The chancery wing, which connects to the main residence by a one-story hyphen, extends along Fuller Street. The chancery, expanded ca. 1930, has a less formal appearance more reflective of an Italianate country villa, than a city palazzo.

On the east and west sides of 16th Street, beyond Meridian Hill Park and its massive retaining wall that extends up the hill, are several more of the street's mansions, including the Warder House, which was moved to the site from K Street, NW in 1923. Saved by architect George Oakley Totten, Jr. the Warder House is the sole-surviving of four H.H. Richardson-designed houses in Washington, D.C. In 1915, while actively engaged by Mary Henderson, George Oakley Totten designed his own house—a stucco-clad, English Arts and Crafts-style house—on Meridian Hill. His house was built towards the rear of his lot, with a large and formal garden between the house and Sixteenth Street. In 1923, when the Warder House at 1515 K Street was threatened with demolition, Totten purchased all of the exterior stonework, windows, roof and interior finishes, including wood paneling, flooring, staircase and other features. He then re-assembled the house on his Meridian Hill property, obliterating his garden oasis and effectively converting his own house into a rear wing of the much larger Warder Mansion, which he developed into luxury apartments. Currently referred to as the Warder-Totten House, the Richardson-designed Romanesque Revival style stone dwelling with its battered sandstone walls, arched entry, wide segmental-arched openings, conical roofed stair tower and all-encompassing red-tile roof and the Arts and Crafts Totten-designed rear wing have been recently renovated into condominium apartments.

The Warder-Totten House sits mid-block between Euclid and Fuller Street, with apartment buildings buttressing either end. North of Fuller Street, however, are two more mansions: the former Spanish Embassy which occupies the northeast corner of Sixteenth and Fuller Streets at 2801 16th Street, and the MacVeagh House (former Embassy of Mexico) located just north of the Spanish Embassy at 2835 16th Street. The Spanish Embassy site consists of the original 1923 mansion, and a 1928 chancery wing that extends along Fuller Street. Mary Henderson built the original mansion, designed by Totten, as a memorial to her late husband and son<sup>7</sup> with the

<sup>7</sup> Mary Henderson's husband, John B. Henderson died in 1913; her son, John B. Henderson, Jr. died in 1923

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intention of offering it to the U.S. government for use as the vice president's mansion. However, then-president Calvin Coolidge objected to the expense of maintaining such a large dwelling and Congress declined the gift offer.<sup>8</sup> The house sat vacant for several years until the Spanish government purchased the building to house its embassy quarters at which time it was extensively renovated.<sup>9</sup> The building consists of a central, stepped cube that rises three-stories in height above flanking octagonal side wings. A projecting porte-cochere with large arched openings fronts the central block, while a circular drive provides easy access from Sixteenth Street. The two-story Chancery wing, extending along Fuller Street toward the rear of the lot, was designed by Jules Henri de Sibour in 1927, in a stylistically compatible manner.

The Embassy of Mexico at 2829 16th Street was initially built as a private residence in 1910, and adapted for embassy use later. During the initial phase of the development of Meridian Hill, Emily Eames MacVeagh had the house built as a gift for her husband, Franklin MacVeagh who was then serving as Secretary of the Treasury in the Taft administration. At the time, the MacVeaghs who were from Chicago and interested in architecture, were renting the Pink Palace at 2600 16th Street from Mary Henderson. Emily MacVeagh was clearly taken by the fledgling street and thus secretly purchased, through the American Security & Trust Company, several lots of land from the Hendersons and other owners, and hired architect Nathan Wyeth to design the house on the site.<sup>10</sup> The four-story, buff-colored brick house lacks the sumptuous ornamentation found on the neighboring Totten mansions, yet is equally, if not more, grand in scale and appearance. Stylistically, the house combines elements of the English, French, and Italian Renaissance, presenting most notably its west-facing piano nobile façade to Sixteenth Street and an Italian loggia on its south elevation. In 1921, the Mexican government purchased the property and added the front porte-cochere, along with the chancery wing to the south and the garage to the rear, to the designs of local architect C.L. Harding.

A group of three more mansions are located on Meridian Hill along 15th Street, on the east side of Meridian Hill Park across from its upper terrace. Mary Henderson built two of these (2401 and 2437 15th Street) and sold the land upon which the third one (2535 15th Street) was built. The Dutch government purchased the lot, and in turn, erected its own embassy building on the site. All three of these buildings, including the former Netherlands Embassy (now the Embassy of Ecuador), were constructed in the 1920s, but were designed in different styles adding to the eclectic nature of architecture on Meridian Hill.

After purchasing the lots of land from Mary Henderson between 1917-18 and 1921-22, the Netherlands began construction of the building at the corner of 15th and Euclid Streets at 2535 15th Street for use as its embassy and chancery quarters. According to newspaper accounts of the period, the Dutch government sent over a "leading architect, Professor Van der Steur of

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<sup>8</sup> "Henderson House, which U.S. Rejected, is Bought by Spain, *The Washington Post*, April 3, 1927.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Henderson offered to sell the building to the government of Mexico, but it decided instead to purchase the MacVeagh House next door.

<sup>10</sup> Emily MacVeagh likely knew of Nathan Wyeth who was, at that time, engaged in the design and construction of the Pullman House at 1125 16th Street, NW commissioned by fellow Chicagoan, Mrs. George Pullman, for her daughter and son-in-law who were living in D.C.

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Amsterdam to cooperate with Mr. Totten” on the design.<sup>11</sup> Completed in 1922, the imposing three-story, five-bay building follows a three-part form more characteristic of grand Parisian mansions than the architecture of Amsterdam.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, the building is four stories high, has buff brick walls and is covered with a tall mansard roof. It is divided into a central recessed main block and two end wings, all consisting of a rusticated ground floor, a piano nobile, a third floor, and an attic level located in the mansard roof. Double-story pilasters span the two principal floors above the base, and large arched pediments rise above the cornice line in the end wings. The building served as the Embassy of Netherlands for several decades; today it is the Embassy of Ecuador.

Mary Henderson’s speculative venture at 2401 15th Street, completed in 1924, was designed in a unique late English Tudor Revival style. The smooth ashlar stone mansion has a definitively Medieval appearance that features an asymmetrically arranged façade with an off-center entry flanked by a more centrally located four-story tower with wings to either side. The wings are arranged with banks of metal casement windows on all three floors, those on the north wing being found in a three-story projecting bay. Intended for use as an embassy the mansion was thus designed with a large reception area and a grand staircase that ascends to highly decorated salons, a ballroom and dining hall.<sup>13</sup> Following its completion, the building sat vacant for almost three years until the Egyptian government leased it from Mary Henderson for its legation headquarters in 1927.

Completed in 1928, the mansion at 2437 15th Street was the last mansion built by Mary Henderson on Meridian Hill and the second-to-last mansion built by her before her death in 1931 at the age of 90.<sup>14</sup> The stucco-clad three-story residence is also the least formal of her mansions, appearing less academically correct than the other Meridian Hill examples designed by Totten. The building is designed in a Mediterranean style that is not attributable to any particular time or place, but rather evocative of the Mediterranean region. The three-story, three-bay house is clad with stucco and is covered with a hipped, red tile roof. A porte-cochere which projects from the center of the first floor and a Venetian style tri-partite loggia above it make the center bay the most dominant of the three bays. The side bays feature a symmetrical arrangement of windows and French doors with narrow balconies on the second and third stories. Throughout its history, the building has served as an embassy for the governments of Brazil and Hungary, as headquarters to the American Legion Club, and as current offices to the non-profit Washington Parks and People.

<sup>11</sup> See “Washington’s Hill of Diplomats Rises,” *The New York Times*, July 19, 1925. There is no D.C. Permit to Build to confirm the named architect on this building.

<sup>12</sup> “Holland Claims Elegant New Legation,” *The Washington Post*, October 27, 1922, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> As noted in the *Washington Post*, Mary Henderson apparently expected (or hoped) to lease or sell the building to a central European government. See “Lipscomb Erecting Attractive English Tudor Style House,” *The Washington Post*, March 23, 1924, p. R3.

<sup>14</sup> The last known building to have been constructed by Mary Henderson and designed by George Oakley Totten was Embassy No. 10 at 3149 16th Street, N.W., completed in 1929.

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### Apartment Buildings

There are 30 apartment buildings within the Meridian Hill Historic District boundaries. These multi-family dwellings range significantly in size and character, having been built over the course of several decades and designed according to the stylistic preferences of their time. Generally, the apartment buildings of Meridian Hill were built as luxury apartments meant to appeal to wealthy residents, and were thus in keeping with the established socio-economic composition of the neighborhood. The first apartment building constructed within the boundaries of the historic district dates to 1905, but the majority of the buildings were constructed after 1925 and, even more significantly, after the Depression years and settlement of Mary Henderson's estate following her 1931 death. In general conformance with the zoning regulations, the taller apartment buildings are located along the wider 16th Street, while the smaller buildings occupy the narrower 15th Street and side streets off of 16th Street. These multi-family buildings were erected on undeveloped lots between the area's large mansions and occupy a dominant presence along the streetscape today. The apartment buildings are described below according to two broad classifications: Beaux Arts-period apartment buildings (1905-1925); and Emerging Modernism: Early to mid-20th century apartment buildings (1925-1941).

#### *Beaux Arts-Era Apartment Buildings (1900-1925)*

The first apartment buildings to be constructed within the district were early 20th-century examples of the building type and represent the first wave of the city's luxury apartment buildings. Architecturally, these apartment buildings—namely the Kenesaw (now, the Renaissance Apartments), the Earlington (now, The Claiborne Apartments), Meridian Mansions (now, The Envoy), and the Hadleigh (now, The Roosevelt)—are grand and exuberant structures indicative of the Beaux Arts period. They have irregular shaped footprints with courtyards, projecting window bays, balconies, and rooftop towers all designed to maximize interior light and ventilation and to take advantage of views. These buildings generally present a high degree of applied ornamentation, especially around entranceways, rooflines and windows.

The Kenesaw, a luxury apartment building erected in 1905, was the first apartment building to be constructed in the vicinity, and dominated the sparsely built area at the time. The building, which occupies the majority of its triangular lot, follows an unusual F-shaped plan with finished facades on all sides of the building offering exceptional views in all directions. The Beaux Arts, buff brick building was designed by architect George Stone, Sr. It features three pavilions on its principal 16th Street elevation including the central entry pavilion flanked by recessed wings and projecting end bays.

The Earlington, another luxury apartment building located at 3033 16th Street, north of Columbia Road followed the Kenesaw in 1908. Builder Harry Wardman likely constructed the building in an effort to capitalize upon the success of the Kenesaw Apartments. The four-story, U-shaped brick building has a deep front court facing 16th Street. The entry is located on center of this recessed main block with a polygonal bay rising above the columned entry porch. The first story of the entire building is treated with bands of brick simulating rusticated stone, while a

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broad bracketed cornice runs around the entire building. Bays of equally arranged and paired windows (replacements) define the four floors.

Just south of the Earlington, the Copperfield, built in 1912 by local builder Joseph Moebs and designed by Cloughton West, is a more restrained, six-story, dark brick structure. The original broad and substantial cornice (and an important architectural element of the building), has been removed and the cornice line covered by a plain duo-fascia frieze board.

Across from Meridian Hill Park, the seven-story Meridian Mansions (now The Envoy), built 1916, stands out architecturally for its lively façade and roofline. Designed by Alexander H. Sonneman and described as Renaissance Revival at the time of its construction, the light colored brick building with its terra-cotta balconies and its now-demolished twin rooftop towers contributed to the Beaux Arts eclecticism of the area. The building was erected across from the Meridian Hill Park site, along the rise of 16th Street, dominating its own site above the White-Meyer house and Henderson Castle below it. The Kennedy Brother developers offered the rental residents the ultimate in luxury living, including a three-story garage for 300 cars, plus chauffeurs and servants' quarters above and tennis courts on the garage roof.

The Hadleigh Apartment building (now the Roosevelt), located at the extreme southern end of the historic district at 16th and V Streets<sup>15</sup>, was described at the time of its construction in 1920 as Italian Renaissance with Florentine loggias. Designed by Appleton P. Clark, it is a huge, rectangular, eight-story structure with five identical wings extending out from the main body of the building towards 16th Street. The entire brick and limestone-trimmed building is symmetrically arranged with bays of paired double-hung windows across the façade, with ornamentation limited to the corner quoining and the open loggias on-center of the upper levels of the projecting wings. Rooftop pergolas designed to cap the center three wings were left off of the completed building, due to objections from Mary Henderson who believed the building's added height would impair views from Meridian Hill Park. Architectural historians generally consider the missing pergolas to be a loss for the building.

Joining these large-scale apartment buildings are several smaller-scaled ones, including the Totten-designed Meridian Hill Club, the apartment at 2201-03 15th Street, and two apartments on Crescent Place. The garden-style Meridian Hill Club, designed as luxury artists' studios by George Oakley Totten and built in 1922, presents itself more as an area mansion than as an apartment building. The three-story building is laid out in an E-shape with a large semi-circular drive in front of the recessed central wing. Each of the wings is gable-fronted, covered with a stucco finish, and embellished with an assortment of window arrangements and types, including projecting oriels, long and narrow French doors with flanking sidelights opening onto narrow balconies, and multi-paned casements. The picturesque English Arts and Crafts quality of the apartment building is enhanced by tall chimney stacks and parapeted gables. The interiors of Meridian Mansions are notable for their variety of layout and features, including double-height spaces and galleries, but most notably, ceramic tile murals above the fireplaces, designed by Mrs.

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<sup>15</sup> The Roosevelt Apartment Building is also included within the existing 16th Street Historic District boundaries.

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George Oakley Totten and fired in her kiln across the street at her own home/studio (then the Totten House; after 1925 the combined Warder-Totten house).

Alexander H. Sonneman, architect of Meridian Mansions, designed the more subdued and smaller-scaled Renaissance Revival-style building at 2201-2203 15th Street, built in 1923. This three- and four-story buff brick building is rectangular with a long and central recessed main block and two projecting end wings. The central block, which spans seven equal bays, features round-arched blind arches within which are rectangular windows on the first story and symmetrically arranged and unornamented rectangular windows above. The two-bay-wide end bays project forward from the central block and are articulated by limestone quoining. The entire building is covered with a low red-tiled roof. Although not as architecturally intriguing as his Meridian Mansions apartment building, this Sonneman-designed building creates an appropriately strong eastern edge to Meridian Hill Park that along with the other buildings along the east side of 15th Street, forms an opposing wall to the park's own wall and gives 15th Street added urbanistic strength.

On the western side of the park, the apartment building at 1661 Crescent Place, built in 1925, reflects a quiet formality of design, perfectly in keeping with the stately character of the street established by the White-Meyer and Meridian houses. Designed by architect Joseph Younger, the building is a five-story, red brick and limestone, E-shaped building executed in an elegant Georgian Revival style that diverged from the Beaux Arts tradition of the surrounding buildings. Younger reserved most of the building's ornamentation for its limestone-clad first story. Here, French doors surmounted by double-hung windows are set within arched recesses and are separated by limestone pilasters capped by Mannerist-inspired broken entablatures. The open lawns between the projecting wings of the building's E-shaped plan, are screened by a colonnade of Doric columns, supporting a wide, unadorned frieze. The adjacent Crescent Apartment building at 1685 Crescent Place, built three years earlier in 1922, is a small-scale triangular-shaped brick building with little ornamentation, but maintaining a stately presence.

### *Emerging Modernism: Meridian Hill's mid-20th century Apartment Buildings:*

During the mid-20th century, and especially following the revisions to the 1920 zoning regulations, the development of apartment buildings in Meridian Hill intensified. A dozen major-scale apartment buildings were erected between 1931 and 1941 on vacant lots between the area's existing mansions, filling in the open space between to accommodate the city's growing need for housing. Although classical tastes prevailed such as at the Renaissance Revival-style Embassy Towers (1931), the apartment buildings in this decade generally reflect an increasingly pared-down modern aesthetic. This Modern "style" begins with the early or geometric phase of the Art Deco and continues with the more streamlined Art Moderne, as illustrated by the Dorchester House of 1941, and culminates with several International-style apartment buildings, including the Diplomat Apartments, along with other Joseph Abel-designed examples on 15th Street, N.W.

Generally, the revival-style apartment buildings are located on the side streets, while the larger, more overtly modern ones occupy strategic 15th and 16th street sites. The Embassy Towers

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(1931), designed by Louis T. Rouleau at 1620 Fuller Street is actually a large, five-story U-shaped building that visually appears smaller due largely to its unassuming execution in a Florentine Renaissance Revival-style. Advertised as being in the “exclusive embassy section” just off 16th Street and embodying an appropriately noble presence, the Embassy Towers is constructed of brick with limestone trim found most notably at the central arched entry and along the cornice. The apartment building features blind arcading along the first story to either side of the main entry, and a symmetrical arrangement of windows forming the upper levels, superimposed by an attic level and capped by the limestone-trimmed cornice. Louis T. Rouleau designed two other smaller-scale apartment buildings in the Meridian Hill area, but just outside the historic district, including one at 1630 Fuller Street and another at 1631 Euclid Street.

The Park Tower (1928) at 2440 16th Street and the Garden Towers (1937) at 2325 15th Street, N.W., provide the best illustrations of the geometric phase of the Art Deco style. Both of these buildings face across their respective streets to Meridian Hill Park and both are irregularly massed multi-story brick structures with vertical emphasis created by full-height projecting bays accentuated by limestone bas-reliefs in the window spandrels and Art Deco-style detailing at the cornice lines. The Garden Towers has a limestone entry, chamfered into the irregular, L-shaped building and fronting 15th Street. This entryway features end pilasters and a fluted cornice. The Dorchester Apartments (1941) stands out as Meridian Hill’s premier Art Deco apartment building and is on par with other 16th Street examples, namely the Hightower Apartments located further north along the street. It is a nine-story, T-shaped, buff brick building characterized by a streamlined appearance created by cylindrical window bays at the intersection of the building wings, vertical window spandrels and a prominent entryway and tower. An aluminum marquee marks the entrance to the building and draws attention to the implied tower rising above it. This tower, relatively on-center, is actually no higher than the body of the building, but projects from it and is accentuated by greater solid to void and by black brick spandrels at the attic level. A roofdeck atop the Dorchester provides one of the most sweeping views of the city and was, along with air conditioning and a uniformed doorman, a calling card for the luxury building upon its completion in 1941.

The International Style apartment buildings are well represented on Meridian Hill, including the Century Apartments at 2637 16th Street (1936); the Meridian Hill Hotel (1941-42); the Diplomat Apartments (1940) designed by Joseph Abel, along with several other Abel-designed apartment buildings clustered along 15th Street.

The Century Apartments, built in 1936, is the earliest expression of the International Style on Meridian Hill. Designed by Louis T. Rouleau who is better known for his revival-style buildings, the Century Apartments is an eight-story, buff brick building that still retains the base, shaft and capital of earlier building forms, but presents it in a less hierarchical manner and has an unadorned exterior appearance typical of the style. In addition, the Century Apartments features banks of windows (originally casements, now double-hung replacements) that wrap around the

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building's corners in one of the earliest expressions of this quintessentially Modern architectural treatment.<sup>16</sup>

The Diplomat Apartments (1940) at 2420 16th Street designed by Joseph Abel is an eight-story concrete-frame structure clad in buff brick. The building fills in a wedge-shaped lot located on 16th Street between Meridian Mansions and the Park Towers Apartment buildings. Its severe, unornamented exterior that is indicative of the International Style has a slightly recessed main block with two projecting end wings. Bands of ribbon windows extend across the façade at each floor level and wrap around the building's corners. Across Meridian Hill Park from the Diplomat, Joseph Abel with the firm Dillon and Able designed the Park Square Apartments three years earlier. This apartment is less overtly "modern" in that it features punched window openings as opposed to bands of windows. Balconies along the façade provided excellent views of the park and the city below. Abel also had his hand in the more unassuming apartment buildings at 2327-2331 15th Street and 2656 15th Street.

The Meridian Hill Hotel—a substantial, eight-story, H-shaped building located just north of Meridian Hill Park and occupying the entire block between 15th and 16th Streets—was designed by Louis E. Justement and built by the Defense Homes Corporation in 1941-42. According to period press, the hotel was the first government owned and operated structure intended to house young women who had been brought to the city during World War II to fill government jobs. The 644-room concrete-frame, brick curtain wall structure features horizontal bands of windows, including corner ones (originally casements), separated by brick spandrels, typical of International style architecture of the city.

### Religious and Institutional Buildings of Meridian Hill

Three religious structures and one institution, the Scottish Rite Temple, are all imposing and architecturally significant buildings clustered at the crest of Meridian Hill at its north end at Columbia Road. Another church edifice—Augustana Lutheran Church—bolsters the district's southern extreme at 1511 V Street. As important public expressions of their particular denominations, all of these churches were deliberately sited along 16th Street, the symbolic center of the city and along one of the city's then-most architecturally sophisticated avenues. The northern church buildings are all imposing landmarks of different forms and styles, but all share tall spires that both anchor this northern end and create a visual "gateway" to the city below. The National Baptist Memorial Church (1922-1926), located at the acute corner intersection of Columbia Road and 16th Street, is the northern-most of these three Meridian Hill church edifices. Designed by architect Egerton Swartout, the Baroque stone structure features most notably a bold, three-part circular tower at the apex facing both Columbia Road and 16th Street. The main body of the tower consists of a rounded and colonnaded pavilion with Corinthian columns at the lower level, a telescoping colonnaded pavilion with Doric columns superimposed upon it at the second level, and a domed pavilion capping it at the final level. The

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<sup>16</sup> Local press noted that "The structure represents a new type of apartment architecture for Washington, as it has corner casement windows to add light and improve ventilation." "\$300,000 Apartments Nearing Completion," *The Evening Star*, August 21, 1937, p. C-5.



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dome itself rests upon a colonnaded pavilion, or drum base, with bulls' eye windows serving as its base.

All Soul's Church, designed by Coolidge and Shattuck and built in 1924, is located at 16th and Harvard Streets, just below Columbia Road and immediately north of a string of embassy buildings along the street. As completed, the church was a product of a design competition whose program required that the building "typify Unitarian ideas and ideals, harmonize with the architecture of Washington and fit into the surroundings of the chosen site."<sup>17</sup> Based upon James Gibbs's 18th-century Saint Martin-in-the-Fields church, the brick and limestone All Souls offered a Georgian Colonial style that was associated with Unitarianism in America. The building presents its Roman temple-front portico with Corinthian columns to 16th Street while its cella walls extend to the rear of the lot along Harvard Street where they then intersect with the lower, cross-axis, brick parish house. Above the front portico rises the three-part church tower that culminates with a tall and attenuated spire visible from great distances.

The Washington Chapel of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (1932-33), now the Unification Church, is the most architecturally distinct of the triad of churches. The basilica plan church, designed with unique stripped classical/Art Deco styling was based upon the denomination's mother church, the Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City. A large projecting front tower faces 16th Street, while a long rectangular nave spreads out behind it, and a transept crossing presents its end wall to Columbia Road. The walls of the church are clad in a birds' eye marble quarried in Utah, and have long and narrow, double-height round-arched window openings in the building's narthex and two stories of rectangular window openings along the nave walls.

The Scottish Rite Temple at 2800 16th Street, built in 1938-39, is an austere stripped classical monument having an Egyptian pylon-like form. Featuring a central block and side wings, the building is clad in smooth limestone walls with a single opening (the entrance) on center of the block. A gigantic-order battered architrave surrounds the door, with highly ornate decoration ornamenting the area between the door opening and the lintel of the surround.

At the southern end is Augustana Lutheran Church, built in 1915 to the designs of Charles W. Bolton, architect. In comparison to the churches at Sixteenth Street and Columbia Road that are presenting a national image, this more modest-scaled red brick Tudor-style church has more neighborhood appeal. The church sits upon a slight rise at the base of Meridian Hill, but faces south to the Victorian neighborhood below it.

### Landscaping and Statuary

Meridian Hill Park is the true centerpiece of the historic district. The impressive collections of buildings that surround it were deliberately arranged in a linear fashion along 15th and 16th streets to frame the European-style urban park and to take advantage of views into the park's greensward. From street level, the park's wide terraces, cascading fountain and statuary, as fully

<sup>17</sup> Pamela Scott and Antoinette Lee, *Buildings of the District of Columbia*, p. 315.

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described in the Meridian Hill Park National Register Nomination, are actually hidden gems secreted behind tall retaining walls that were necessitated by the site's topography. This concrete retaining wall which ascends 15th and 16th Street from Florida Avenue to Euclid Street is an exceptional landscaping feature within the city's neighborhood streets and an important urban element in the historic district.

Similarly, Henderson's Castle wall—across 16th Street from Meridian Hill Park—is a red Seneca sandstone wall that historically enclosed the Henderson Castle property. The wall and its crenellated entrance gate—the surviving remnant of Henderson Castle property—is not only an important cultural landmark, but is a significant landscape element of the streetscape. Both the Henderson Castle wall and the Meridian Hill Park wall were necessitated by the steep grade and topography of the site, and by the grading of 16th Street in the early 20th century.

Other landscaping elements also contribute to the character of Meridian Hill. In particular, at the top of the hill at 16th Street and Columbia Road and at 16th and Mount Pleasant Streets are two small triangular parklets (Reservation 309B and 309C (Rabaut Park)). The 16th and Mt. Pleasant Street parklet (Reservation 309B) contains a memorial to Francis Asbury, the first Methodist bishop in the United States. Historically, the open space was part of the Kenesaw Apartments property, but in 1913, the owners gave the apex of the triangular lot to the city for a park. In 1924, the equestrian statue of Francis Asbury was erected upon the lot providing an important focal point along Sixteenth Street.

The triangular Rabaut Park at 16th and Columbia Road was created as part of the McMillan Commission Plan (1901) to establish a series of public parks and was affected by the laying out of Harvard Street by 1913. This park remains a vital green space at a busy urban intersection and a transition area between 16th Street and its adjacent residential neighborhoods.

### Non-Contributing Buildings

There are sixteen buildings that have been determined non-contributing. These are buildings that were either built in 1949 or later—the end-date of the Period of Significance—or they lack integrity, or the architectural characteristics or historic associations for which the district has been determined significant. Of these 16 buildings, 11 are apartment buildings, four are single-family dwellings, and one is a secondary garage. The non-contributing apartment buildings generally post-date the Period of Significance for the historic district. For the most part, they were erected upon still undeveloped lots, though one exception to this rule exists: the apartment building at 2620 16th Street replaced one of the original embassy buildings (the southern half of the Henderson-built duplex at 2620-2622 16th Street).

Three of the apartment buildings were built as a group during the period of significance (2307-2309-2311 15th Street); two of them have been added onto and altered almost beyond recognition and have thus lost integrity. Four of the non-contributing buildings are attached single-family dwellings that were built in 1936 and are out of scale and character with the neighborhood. These four dwellings are an aberration in the district that otherwise includes large mansions, luxury apartment buildings and church edifices. These dwellings are strategically

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sited, however, across from Meridian Hill Park, forming part of its eastern edge and visible from the park.

## INTEGRITY

The Meridian Hill Historic District has high integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The neighborhood sits atop a hill (Meridian Hill) whose base formed the original edge of the city and historically delineated Washington City from Washington County. From Meridian Hill Park, the site offers commanding views of the city to the south and provides a vantage point for understanding the city's historic topography. The historic district retains its setting as an exclusive neighborhood, established during the City Beautiful Movement, and defined by its fine collection of detached mansions and sizeable apartment buildings and churches designed in a variety of styles. The contributing buildings of Meridian Hill are all architect-designed buildings representing an array of Beaux Arts styles, and constructed of quality materials with a high degree of workmanship. Alterations to the area's mansions are generally limited to rear additions and some window replacements. The apartment buildings and churches have only minor exterior alterations. The district contains 16 non-contributing buildings, but they are integral to the district's streetscapes and view sheds, so cannot be appropriately removed from the boundaries. These non-contributing buildings do not generally detract from the overall character or historical significance of the district. The district retains its integrity of feeling and association as an exclusive, early 20th-century neighborhood, both through its individual parts, and as an important collection.

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**MERIDIAN HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT CONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS**

<b>ID Number</b>	<b>Building Name</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>C/NC</b>
=====	=====	=====	=====	=====
0188 -0802-	Roosevelt Hotel	2101 16th Street NW	1919	C
0188 -0807-	Augustana Lutheran Church	1511 V Street NW	1915	C
2568 -0806-	White-Meyer House	1624 Crescent Place NW	1910	C
2568 -0809-	Meridian House	1630 Crescent Place NW	1923	C
2571 -0011-	Crescent (The)	1685 Crescent Place NW	1922	C
2571 -0050-	Old French Embassy	2460 16th Street NW	1907	C
2571 -0101-	Park Tower	2440 16th Street NW	1928	C
2571 -0104-	Meridian Mansions	2400 16th Street NW	1916	C
2571 -0104-	Kalorama Garage	2400 (Rear) 16 <sup>th</sup> Street NW	1916	C
2571 -0816-	Apartment/2434 16 <sup>th</sup> Street	2434 16 <sup>th</sup> Street, NW	1936	C
2571 -0951-	Diplomat Apartments	2420 16th Street NW	1940	C
2571 -0954-	Crescent Place Coop	1661 Crescent Place NW	1925	C
2572 -0813-	Dorchester House	2480 16th Street NW	1941	C
2574 -0032-	Warder-Totten House	2633 16th Street NW	1924	C
2574 -0829-	Century Apartments	2651 16th Street NW	1936	C
2574 -0830-	Celsius, The	2656 15th Street NW	1936	C
2574 -0831-	Meridian Hill Hotel	2601 16th Street NW	1941	C
2574 -0832-	Townhouse/2635 16th Street	2635 16th Street NW	1907	C
2575 -0030-	Regent (The)	2517 Mozart Place NW	1936	C
2575 -0031-	Venetian (Pink)Palace	2600 16th Street NW	1905	C
2575 -0830-	Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania	2622 16th Street NW	1907	C
2575 -0834-	Embassy of Poland	2640 16th Street NW	1910	C
2575 -0843-	Embassy of Cuba	2630 16th Street NW	1918	C
2575 -0844-	Embassy Towers Apartments	1620 Fuller Street NW	1931	C

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**MERIDIAN HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT CONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS—Cont.**

<b>ID Number</b>	<b>Building Name</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>C/NC</b>
2577 -0038-	Embassy of Mexico	2829 16th Street NW	1910	C
2577 -0038-B	Garage at Mexican Embassy	2829 (Rear)16th Street NW	1921	C
2577 -0039-	Copperfield (The)	2901 16th Street NW	1912	C
2577 -0043-	All Souls Unitarian Church	2835 16th Street NW	1922	C
2577 -0821-	Embassy of Spain	2801 16th Street NW	1923	C
2578 -0025-	Scottish Rite Temple	2800 16th Street NW	1939	C
2578 -0822-	Church of Jesus Christ of LDS	2810 16th Street NW	1931	C
2578 -0831-	Embassy of Italy	2700 16th Street NW	1924	C
2589- 0476	Argonne, (The)	1629 Columbia Road, NW	1922	C
2591 -0808-	Embassy (The)	1613 Harvard Street NW	1914	C
2594 -0175-	Kenesaw (The)	3060 16th Street NW	1905	C
2660 -0868-	Apartment Building	2201-03 15th Street NW	1923	C
2661 -0217-18	Apartment Building	2327-2331 15th Street NW	1936	C
2661 -0830-	Garden Towers	2325 15th Street NW	1937	C
2662 -0863-	Park Square	2407 15th Street NW	1937	C
2662 -0864-	Old Egyptian Embassy	2401 15th Street NW	1923	C
2662 -0871-	Josephine Butler Parks Center	2437 15th Street NW	1927	C
2663 -0825-	Meridian Park Apartments	2445 15th Street NW	1936	C
2663 -0843-	(Old) Netherlands Embassy	2535 15th Street NW	1922	C
2666 -0202-	Meridian Hill Club	2633 15th Street NW	1922	C
2671 -0199-	Earlington (The)	3033 16th Street NW	1908	C
2675 -0826-A	National Baptist Memorial	3001 16th Street NW	1924	C

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**MERIDIAN HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT—NON—CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES**

<b>ID Number</b>	<b>Building Name</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>C/NC</b>
=====	=====	=====	=====	=====
0188 -0072-	Meridian Towers Apartments	2112 New Hampshire Ave NW	1964	NC
2574 -0033-	Park Meridian Apartments	2637 16th Street NW	1965	NC
2574 -0808-	[school/2639 16th Street/NW]	2639 16th Street NW	1950	NC
2575 -0023-	[apartment house/16th Street]	2620 16th Street NW	1965	NC
2575- 0843	Cuban Embassy Garage	2630(R) 16 <sup>th</sup> Street NW	1919-27	NC
2660 -0203-	[apartment building/15th	2301 15th Street NW	1936	NC
2660 -0203-+	[apartment building/15th	2307 15th Street NW	1936	NC
2660 -0207-+	[apartment building/15th	2311 15th Street NW	1936	NC
2660 -0219-	[rowhouse/15th Street NW/2313]	2313 15th Street NW	1936	NC
2660 -0220-	[rowhouse/15th Street NW/2315]	2315 15th Street NW	1936	NC
2660 -0221-	[rowhouse/15th Street NW/2317]	2317 15th Street NW	1936	NC
2660 -0222-	[rowhouse/15th Street NW/2319]	2319 15th Street NW	1936	NC
2666 -0832-	Hilltop House	1475 Euclid Street NW	1949	NC
2671 -0819-	Richman Towers	3055 16th Street NW	1954	NC
2671 -1056-	Condominium	3039 16th Street NW	1990	NC
2774 -0029-	Condominium	2650 15th Street NW	2010	NC

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**MERIDIAN HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT  
LIST OF RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER**

Name of Resource =====	Address =====	Date of NR Listing =====
Meridian Hill Park	Reservation 327	1974; NHL-1994
Francis Asbury Memorial	Reservation 309-B	2007
White-Meyer House	1624 Crescent Place NW	1988; Amended 2010
Meridian House	1630 Crescent Place NW	1973; Amended 2010
Meridian Hall (Old Egyptian Embassy)	2401 15th Street NW	1991
Old Hungarian Embassy (J.Butler Parks Center)	2437 15th Street NW	1988
Warder-Totten House	2633 16th Street NW	1972
Meridian Mansions	2400 16th Street NW	1983
Park Tower	2440 16th Street NW	1989
Pink Palace	2600 16th Street NW	1991
Embassy of Mexico	2829 16th Street NW	2013
Embassy of Mexico Garage	2829 (Rear)16th St NW	2013

**12 Records in this Report**

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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



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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

ARCHITECTURE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1888-1949

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1888; 1910; 1931; 1949

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Mary Foote Henderson

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

George Oakley Totten, Jr.; Nathan Wyeth; John Russell Pope; Louis T. Rouleau;  
Dillon & Abel

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

With its important collection of grand Beaux Arts-style mansions, foreign legations, luxury apartment buildings and religious edifices to either side of a formal park, the Meridian Hill Historic District provides a unique illustration of how the City Beautiful Movement inspired the development of Washington as an international city beyond the National Mall. The historic district occupies a prominent site at an important rise in the topography of the city and includes the stretches of 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Streets from Florida Avenue on the south to beyond Columbia Road on the north, including the magnificent neo-Classical style Meridian Hill Park. The architectural sophistication of the buildings of Meridian Hill reinforces the urbanistic importance of 16<sup>th</sup> Street as a major avenue of the L'Enfant Plan emanating from the city's symbolic center. More particularly, the historic district reflects the singular imagination and influence of Mary Foote Henderson and her husband, Senator John Brooks Henderson in creating and beautifying 16<sup>th</sup> Street and Meridian Hill as a prestigious enclave during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The district also reflects the contributions of notable architects, diplomats, developers and, of particular note, other women of means, in creating this exclusive area.

The Meridian Hill Historic District meets National Register Criteria A, B, C, and D. It meets Criterion A for its association with the emergence and growth of 16th Street beyond the city limits and for its association with the transformation of Meridian Hill from a rugged and under-developed post-Civil War settlement into an impressive gateway to the nation's capital. It meets National Register Criterion B for its association with Mary Foote Henderson who conceived of, campaigned for and affected the deliberate development of Meridian Hill. In particular, Mary Henderson successfully lobbied Congress to purchase a three-block tract of land on Meridian Hill to build the formidable European-style Meridian Hill Park that became the framework around which she and her husband created a socially prominent enclave of wealthy statesmen and foreign emissaries. The desirability of 16th Street and Meridian Hill was in part instilled by Mary Henderson's campaign for the "Avenue of the Presidents" and her successful development of an elite residential enclave on Meridian Hill.

The historic district meets National Register Criterion C for its impressive collection of mansions of exceptional architectural value largely built between 1905 and 1928 that reflect the eclecticism of the Beaux Arts style of architecture. These buildings embody the distinguishing characteristics of architectural styles and building types, offer quality craftsmanship and artistry and have been identified as notable works of architects and landscape architects. The historic district includes eight of twelve embassy mansions built through the collaborative effort of Mary Henderson and architect George Oakley Totten, Jr., plus other private mansions and embassies commissioned by some of the city's most socially prominent individuals or foreign governments, representing the works of several locally and nationally recognized master architects, including most notably John Russell Pope, Warren & Wetmore, and Nathan Wyeth.

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In addition, the historic district contains an array of luxury apartment buildings, built primarily in the 1920s through 1940s, that provides an important visual lesson in the evolving residential patterns of the city, namely in the increasing acceptance of apartment building living among the city's wealthy and socially elite. Also, several monumental religious edifices three of which are clustered at the district's northern end form a conspicuous conglomerate whose spires, visible from a distance, identify the urbanistic import of Sixteenth Street. Together, the church buildings, all of which represent the works of notable architects, create a "gateway" to the city.

Finally, Meridian Hill Historic District National Register Criterion D since it has the potential to yield archaeological resources that would contribute knowledge to the history or pre-history of the city. To date, two sites have been identified within the proposed district (DC Archeology sites 51NW014 & 51NW043). The area around the proposed district would have been favorable for human occupation throughout the prehistoric, contact, and historic periods, and remains from all periods are expected where subsequent development has not caused a loss of resources. Geoarchaeological testing in the park prior to National Park Service drainage repairs identified intact soil horizons buried by fill. These buried soils provide evidence that intact prehistoric and historic archaeological remains may still be present in filled areas.

In addition, a former stream course was once present in the park's northwest corner that continued through the proposed district and now flows in pipes as part of the sewer system. Location models for the region indicate high to moderate prehistoric potential for areas generally within 500 feet of streams. Potential paleosols are found in and around the proposed district, and are locations where prehistoric sites from the paleoindian period could be present beneath wind-blown loesses that were deposited at the end of the Pleistocene era.

Similarly, the district has the potential to yield sub-surface ante- and post-bellum domestic and farm-related sites associated with the Meridian House farm operations, the Civil War military and contraband encampments, and post-Civil War African American-related domestic, commercial, educational, and religious sites.

The Meridian Hill Historic District includes five religious edifices within its boundaries. The buildings qualify as contributing resources under Criterion Consideration A since each of the buildings derives its primary significance from its architectural distinction. Three of the religious edifices are clustered at the northern end of Meridian Hill at the strategic intersection of 16<sup>th</sup> Street and Columbia Road, marking the intersection as a sort of gateway to the city.

The Period of Significance for the Historic District extends from 1888 when the Hendersons erected "Henderson Castle" at the base of Meridian Hill up to, but excluding 1949 when it was demolished.

Any below-surface resources that may pre-date the beginning date and reflect the area's early, non-extant history should be considered potentially eligible as contributing resources to the historic district.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)**

Pre-Civil War Era Meridian Hill (1816-1865)

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the area known today as Meridian Hill was part of the extensive landholdings of Robert Peter of Georgetown and was thus known as Peter's Hill.<sup>18</sup> In 1816, however, Commodore David Porter, a naval hero in the War of 1812, purchased a 110-acre<sup>19</sup> tract of Peter's land and forever changed its name by dubbing it "Meridian Hill." Porter seized upon the name, as it was a generally held understanding that the "central meridian of the District of Columbia" (16th Street) passed through this tract of land.<sup>20</sup> Capitalizing upon this belief, Porter built his house to straddle this unofficial meridian line. The house (reputedly designed by architect George Hadfield, though no definitive proof of that attribution has been uncovered), was sited so that the south-facing front portico was on axis with Sixteenth Street and due north of the President's House. Commodore Porter's son, David Dixon Porter described the Meridian Hill house site in his book "Memoir of David Porter of the United States Navy (1875):

"The chain of hills, on which the house was built, forms an amphitheater around the city, and the hills were, at the time, covered with a fine growth of forest, the whole forming an extensive landscape which, to this day, has lost little of its beauty."<sup>21</sup>

Porter located a "meridian" stone in front of his house, "on the outer edge of the south lawn, in close proximity to the house." This meridian stone from which Meridian Hill officially records its name stood on the site until circa 1900 when 16th Street beyond Florida Avenue was widened and straightened, necessitating its removal. The meridian stone "was wrought and near two feet across and of the same height. The north edge of it was circular and upon it was afterward

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Peter's entire tract of land was called Mount Pleasant and extended well north and south of today's Florida Avenue. This particular section of the larger tract was reportedly called "Peter's Hill."

<sup>19</sup> Secondary sources alternately identify it as 110 acres or 157 acres. John Claggett Proctor notes that Porter's son, Admiral David Dixon Porter, indicates in his "Memoir of Commodore David Porter of the United States Navy" (1875) that the tract consisted of 157 acres, but Proctor advances that 110 acres is probably the correct amount. See Proctor, "City's Early Progress Reflected in Meridian Hill," *The Washington Star*, July 5, 1942, B-4.

<sup>20</sup> In 1804, D.C. Surveyor Nicholas King identified the First Meridian of the United States as passing through the north and south doors of the White House and thus erected the Jefferson Obelisk on the Mall to mark that line. In actuality, though, Andrew Ellicott had used the longitude intended for the Capitol building as his prime meridian in his 1792 rendition of the L'Enfant Plan, not 16th Street. At the same time that people thought 16th Street was the city's prime meridian, there was also some talk of it becoming the official Prime Meridian for the United States. During the 19th century, there was a need to establish an official meridian, or longitudinal base point for navigational purposes, map mapping and scientific works. Some early efforts were made to establish this official meridian in the District of Columbia, and indeed on Meridian Hill. However, in 1883, Greenwich (England) was accepted as the official Prime Meridian for the United States. See "Meridian Hill Park," Historic American Building Survey (DC-532) for a history of the prime meridian and Meridian Hill Park. Also, see *Roads to Diversity: Adams Morgan Heritage Trail, Heritage Sign 2*, (Cultural Tourism, DC).

<sup>21</sup> As quoted in John Claggett Proctor, "City's Early Progress Reflected in Meridian Hill," *The Washington Star*, July 5, 1942, B-4.

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placed a brass sun dial.”<sup>22</sup> Today, a brass plaque erected in 1923 by the Daughters of the American Revolution on the Meridian Hill Park wall along 16th Street commemorates the meridian stone. The plaque notes that the stone was “formerly located 52 feet 9 inches west of this tablet.”

Porter, who had come to Washington following a service of distinction during the War of 1812, tried unsuccessfully to farm his Meridian Hill land. James K. Paulding, Secretary of the Navy, a novelist and a good friend of David Porter, satirized his friend’s “system” of farming in his book, “John Bull in America” (1825):

‘He had a kitchen garden of five acres, and had to buy vegetables for winter; he had a hundred acres of corn, oats, and wheat, and was obliged to purchase grain for his stock...Thousands of carloads of manure were hauled upon the farm, only to be washed away by spring rains; the place was in beautiful order, highly satisfactory to the casual observer, but it yielded absolutely nothing...On the whole, Capt. Porter found that he had been more successful in ploughing [sic] the sea than he was likely to be ploughing terra firma.’<sup>23</sup>

By 1820 and deeply in debt, Porter mortgaged the property to his fellow commodore, John Rodgers, who in turn leased it to John Quincy Adams. Following his presidential term in the White House, Adams apparently retired to Porter’s Meridian Hill house. In the years before the Civil War, Meridian Hill became a popular picnic place, where dancing took place in the mansion. An 1860 ad in the *Evening Star* informs the public that among other things, “this beautiful romantic spot has a bar with the choicest liquors.”<sup>24</sup> Shortly thereafter, during the Civil War, Union Army hospitals and camps occupied Meridian Hill, including the Massachusetts Brigade and the New York 77th Regiment.<sup>25</sup> An account of Surg. George T. Stevens of the 77th regiment notes,

“We encamped on Meridian Hill December 1, 1861. Meridian Hill is the most delightful locality in the city of Washington. The plain on which the city stands extends back some two miles from the river and is terminated by a line of hills. Along the margin of these hills were some fine old suburban mansions...The Porter mansion became our hospital and also for a time served as headquarters...From the broad piazza we could look upon the busy scenes of the city and see the vessels passing up and down the river.”<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> As quoted in Proctor, “City’s Early Progress Reflected in Meridian Hill.” In describing the stone, “wrought” appears to mean “cut” or “dressed.” Proctor indicates that the stone was removed to 14th and R Streets where it was used as a carriage step for some time, but by the time the article was written in 1942, the stone was apparently long gone.

<sup>23</sup> As quoted in Proctor, “City’s Early Progress Reflected in Meridian Hill.” See also Charles O. Paullin in “Washington City and the Old Navy,” (CHS, Vol. 33-34, p. 176)

<sup>24</sup> See John Claggett Proctor, “Meridian Hill Transformation,” *The Evening Star*, December 7, 1947. It is not known who owned the mansion during that period, but the 1861 Boschke Map indicates the name of G. Thompson next to the building’s footprint.

<sup>25</sup> *Sixteenth Street Architecture*, Vol. 1, p. 323.

<sup>26</sup> Proctor, “Meridian Hill Transformation.”

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In 1863<sup>27</sup>, the Porter house and then-Civil War hospital succumbed to a major fire, leaving no known photographs or drawings of the dwelling. A two-story brick secondary house on the property did survive the fire, however. This house, known through a circa 1900 photograph, remained on the site until 1915 when it was removed to begin construction of Meridian Hill Park.<sup>28</sup>

### The Residential Subdivision of Meridian Hill (1860-1888)

#### *Hall and Elvans' Subdivision of Meridian Hill*

During the Civil War, many of the city's military hospitals, forts, and camps including that of Meridian Hill became havens for African Americans (both freemen and escaped slaves) who found safety, protection and employment there. After the war, the African-American presence in these areas often took root as small communities emerged. On Meridian Hill, real estate speculators saw the potential for greater development of the area, and in 1867, *Hall & Elvans' Subdivision of Meridian Hill* was born. The subdivision, divided into building lots by Hall & Elvans for Isaac E. Messmore, consisted of 22 squares between Boundary Street (Florida Avenue) and Columbia Road and 15th Street and 18th Street. The squares were generally laid out in a grid pattern, though two streets, Prospect (present-day Belmont) and Crescent Streets curved west of 16th Street (then called Meridian Avenue, north of Boundary Street). One street, Messmore Street (now Mozart Place), was named for owner, Isaac E. Messmore.<sup>29</sup> Meridian Avenue curved west of the true axis of 16th Street, most likely to avoid the remnants of David Porter's mansion, whose footprint is still indicated on the original plat map. Superior Street (present-day Kalorama Road) cut through the plat on a diagonal. Each square, numbered 1-22, was divided into a series of building lots that generally averaged 50' x 150' and contained 7,500 square feet.

Wayland Seminary, an impressive and architecturally avant-garde, 3-1/2-story Second Empire-style brick building was built by African Americans and completed in 1873-74. It was located at 15th and Euclid streets, immediately behind the surviving farmhouse, and stood out as the first

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<sup>27</sup> In his manuscript, "*The History of Meridian Hill*," Stephen R. McKeivitt states that the Porter mansion was ruined by fire in 1866, rather than in 1863.

<sup>28</sup> The footprint of this secondary house and a one-story outbuilding appears on the 1903 Sanborn map on Square 7 of Hall and Elvan's Subdivision. Also see, "Meridian Hill Mansion to Go," *The Washington Post*, February 9, 1915, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> For information on Isaac Messmore, Richard M. Hall and John R. Elvans, see McKeivitt, "*The History of Meridian Hill*," p. 31-38. Isaac Messmore, who had served as a colonel in the Union Army and may have been familiar with Meridian Hill, purchased the property in 1867. He went into business with John R. Elvans and Richard M. Hall, both real estate men in Washington. Elvans, who established J.R. Elvans' Hardware business in 1854, was a strong supporter of equal rights for former slaves. As a developer, he is known mainly for assisting the Freedmen's Bureau in purchasing Barry Farms in southeast, D.C. which the federal government then subdivided into farms for newly freed slaves. Richard M. Hall was also a real estate agent who worked with Elvans in developing other tracts of land, including Barry Farms. Of the city directories searched between 1865 and 1871, Isaac E. Messmore's name was found only in the 1868 book which shows him living at 22 4-1/2 Street with no profession listed.

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substantial building to be constructed on an established lot within the subdivision. The seminary had been organized in 1865-66 to train African American clergy and teachers. It was soon recognized, along with the Richmond Theological Seminary, as the best such institution in the ministry. Annual commencement exercises for its 300-student body attracted prominent speakers including Frederick Douglass throughout its history. In 1897, the Baptist Church voted to convert Wayland Seminary into a college and to move it to Richmond, Virginia, the home state for a majority of its students. According to historic maps, the seminary building no longer stood on its Meridian Hill site by 1903.

In 1873, 16th Street was paved beyond Florida Avenue to Columbia Road. Called Meridian Avenue, it was narrower than present-day 16th Street and jogged west of the wider 16th Street extension as platted on historic maps. A standpipe, located in the center of 16th Street, was later remembered as a local area landmark. By the 1880s, Hall and Elvans' subdivision had grown to include a significant number of frame dwellings, a couple of small stores, plus the more substantial Public School No. 10 for blacks at 16th Street and Columbia Road. By 1887, as illustrated on historic maps including the G.M. Hopkins Atlas (plate 40), the subdivision's development was most heavily clustered along the two-block stretch of 15th Street between Chapin and Euclid Streets where a collection of two-story frame dwellings, occupied exclusively by working-class African Americans, stood side-by-side.<sup>30</sup> Historic photographs of these dwellings taken prior to their removal and on file with the Commission of Fine Arts show the houses to follow a standard urban model of the period: two-story, two-bay, weatherboard-clad, flat-fronted dwellings with architectural ornamentation relegated to bracketed cornices and door hood molds. One exception to this is the house at 1510 Euclid Street that sported a double-story porch with scroll-sawn balustraded railings and Chippendale frieze boards.<sup>31</sup> Based upon the building's more ornate quality of design, it is not surprising that the owner-occupant of this particular house was a grocer, and thus a member of the merchant class, rather than the more heavily represented laboring class.<sup>32</sup>

A sizeable number of other dwellings, which appear isolated or in small clusters, were scattered throughout the subdivision and were also primarily home to African Americans. White residents appear to have occupied the periphery of Meridian Hill, such as along Florida Avenue and Columbia Road, though some pockets of whites could also be found on the Hill, namely along Prospect Street, Crescent Place (where the subdivision's few brick dwellings stood) and the 1500 block of Huron (Fuller) Street. By the 1880s, as indicated on a plat map, the subdivision included 106 houses, 103 privies, and 20 wells or cisterns.

### *Joaquin Miller Log Cabin*

Of particular historical note, yet completely incongruous to the houses making up the African American establishment was the existence of the Joaquin Miller log cabin, now located in Rock Creek Park. This log cabin, clearly identified on the Hopkins Map as being on Block 5, Lot 4 of

<sup>30</sup> The 1900 U.S. Census confirms that the Meridian Hill residents were all African Americans holding unskilled and skilled jobs. Many of these residents owned the houses in which they lived.

<sup>31</sup> Photographs of the Meridian Hill Houses, Commission of Fine Arts, Meridian Hill Vertical File.

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Census, 1900, E.D. 12, p. 16.

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Hall and Elvans' subdivision, west of 16th Street on today's Belmont Road, was built by Joaquin Miller in 1883 while he sojourned in the Capital during a sort of sabbatical from the West. Known as the "Poet of the Sierras" for his book of poetry titled *Song of the Sierras*, Joaquin Miller is most celebrated for his later poem "Columbus." Miller was not only a picturesque literary figure, but was also a well-known pacifist. As editor of the Eugene (Oregon) Review during the Civil War, Miller wrote many articles in the interest of peace and directed one against Sherman's March for which his newspaper was suppressed and his journalistic career cut short. Miller loved nature and chose a wooded section of Meridian Hill upon which he built his cabin.<sup>33</sup> While living there he is quoted as saying, "I sit up here in my fine cabin, while the President himself sits down there at the end of the street with his little cabinet."<sup>34</sup> Miller apparently took daily walks into the city from Meridian Hill to learn the daily political news, but stayed only one year before moving back West. He gave his cabin to a friend, who in turn donated it to the Sierra Club. In 1912, the National Park Service became its new owner, overseeing its move from Meridian Hill to its current site in Rock Creek Park.

### *Henderson Castle*

The most seminal and ultimately transforming development on Meridian Hill began in 1888 when former Missouri Senator John B. Henderson and his wife, Mary Foote Henderson started purchasing land for their home in the Hall and Elvans' subdivision. Other than the African-American community that was entrenched along 15th Street of the platted subdivision, Meridian Hill remained an under-developed and rugged area on the immediate outskirts of the city. At the time, the wide 16th Street ended at Florida Avenue, becoming the much narrower and unpaved Meridian Avenue that jogged west and ascended the hill to its crest at about present-day Fuller Street and further north to Columbia Road.

The Hendersons acquired six adjacent lots on the west side of 16th Street (Lots 1-6 of Block 3 of Hall and Elvans' Subdivision of Meridian Hill) just above Florida Avenue. In April 1888, having completed the purchase of these six lots, the Hendersons began construction of their imposing red Seneca sandstone mansion. Known at first as Boundary Castle and later as Henderson's Castle, the manse was apparently modeled after a castle that Mary Henderson had seen in the Rhine country. The aptly dubbed "castle" with its fortified Medieval appearance, stood at the head of the escarpment leading up 16th Street to Columbia Road.

The entrance gates faced 16th Street, but the house itself, with its panoply of towers, projecting bays and its Romanesque-styled arched porch, faced south towards the White House. There the Henderson lived until their deaths—his in 1913 and hers in 1931—advocating for and transforming Meridian Hill and 16th Street over the decades from a small African American community of modest frame residences into a grand avenue of private mansions and foreign legations fronting Meridian Hill Park—a monumental and neo-classically inspired public garden vociferously promoted by Mary Henderson. Mrs. Henderson imagined 16th Street as a

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<sup>33</sup> "Joaquin Miller's Greatest Poem 'Columbus' Recalled by America's Anniversary," *The Washington Post*, October 18, 1936, B-2.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Kelsey Williams, *Scenes from the Past, The Intowner*, June 2007, p. 10-11.



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monumental avenue on par with the finest in Europe, including the Champs Elysees in Paris, and with great persistence embarked on a long-term effort to realize this vision.

### The Influence of John Brooks and Mary F. Henderson on Meridian Hill (1888-1931)

The development of Meridian Hill as an elite diplomatic center along an exclusive thoroughfare in the nation's capital is largely the product of the efforts of Mary and John Henderson. The Hendersons' influence extended the full length of the 16th Street corridor, but was most concentrated on Meridian Hill, where they had extensive land holdings and where they controlled most of the immediate development.<sup>35</sup>

#### *John Brooks Henderson and Mary Foote Henderson*<sup>36</sup>

John Brooks Henderson (1826-1913), a Virginian by birth, grew up in Missouri where he became first a teacher, then a lawyer and state legislator. After several unsuccessful bids for Congress, Henderson was appointed U.S. senator from Missouri in 1862 to replace Truett Polk, who had resigned. Henderson was then elected to the position the following year, ultimately serving as senator from 1863-1869. In 1868, during his senatorial years, Henderson married Mary Newton Foote (see below). While serving in Congress, Henderson drafted the 13th Amendment to the Constitution (abolishing slavery) and voted against the conviction of Andrew Johnson on the impeachment charges against him. In large part due to this vote, Henderson lost his bid for re-election to the Senate in 1870; in 1872, he also failed to win in a race for Governor of Missouri. In 1884, he was President of the Republican national convention and five years later retired to Washington, D.C., moving into his newly constructed Boundary Castle. There he remained politically active until his death in 1913, serving, most notably, as a delegate to the Pan American Congress.

Mary Newton Foote Henderson (1841-1931), the daughter of Elisha Foote of New York, was an indomitable figure. During her four decades in Washington, Mary Henderson was at the height of Washington society. She hosted large and extravagant parties at her home, while also energetically campaigning for a variety of causes, the most ardent being the development of the city, and namely Sixteenth Street and Meridian Hill. Mary Henderson's interest in Sixteenth Street and Meridian Hill began in 1888 with construction of Boundary Castle and continued until her death in 1931. During that period and in an effort to make Sixteenth Street the ceremonial gateway to the nation's capital, Mary Henderson enthusiastically supported proposals to re-locate the White House and Lincoln Memorial atop Meridian Hill, and to develop a formal park there, while personally pursuing the aggrandizement of the Avenue through her own development plans. With great business acumen, Mary Henderson and her husband assembled numerous building lots along Fifteenth and Sixteenth streets. She developed them with large and elegant residential and embassy buildings, for which she then sought out occupants (either buyers or renters) who met her desired demographics (in particular, foreign governments whom she

<sup>35</sup> Assessment records indicate that some lots were owned by Mr. John Henderson and others by Mary Henderson. In general, the press credits Mary Henderson with building the houses, but in some cases it identifies John Henderson as the builder.

<sup>36</sup> The following biographies are substantially excerpted from *Sixteenth Street Architecture*, Vol. 1, p. 343-347.

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courted to locate their embassies there). Although not all of her campaigns were successful, Mary Henderson's efforts at developing Meridian Hill not only profoundly transformed the hilltop, but also influenced the nature of growth along the entire Sixteenth Street corridor.

Although architecture and city planning were her passions, Mary Henderson was also involved in a number of non-building related crusades. She was a strict vegetarian and strongly opposed the use of alcohol and tobacco. In 1906, Mary Henderson made local headlines when she allowed the many bottles of unused wine in her cellar to be cleared out and smashed on a rock on the lawn.<sup>37</sup> She was extremely health conscious, particularly for her day, penning her views in a 700-page book titled *The Aristocracy of Health* and even patented an early exercise machine. When Mary Henderson died in 1931 at the age of 90, the *Evening Star* reported, "Each day rain or shine, she drove twice daily to the Lincoln Memorial and walked twice each time around the reflecting pool." Despite these progressive attitudes, Mary Henderson held onto her Victorian-era fashion sense, wearing long skirts and objecting publicly to women's fashions of the day—short skirts, flesh-colored stockings, and "immodest" bathing attire. In another contradiction, she opposed divorce, yet strongly supported women's suffrage.

#### Mary Henderson and "Her" Sixteenth Street

Mary Henderson began advocating for what she often referred to as "my Sixteenth Street" shortly after her 1888 move to the city and into Boundary Castle. Her plan to improve Sixteenth Street—the northern approach to the White House—grew directly out of the City Beautiful Movement. This movement, codified in D.C. by the McMillan Commission Plan, sought to improve cities both physically and morally through civic enhancement, sanitation, and beautification projects. For Sixteenth Street, Henderson envisioned a ceremonial entrance to the city. This involved the removal of the "unsightly shacks" and lesser buildings along the avenue and their replacement with monuments, grand mansions and foreign legations that were commensurate with a nation's capital. In published remarks to Congress, Henderson noted:

"Something like the Champs Elysees, Sixteenth Street is central, straight, broad and long...On the way down its seven-mile length to the portals of the White House each section of the thoroughfare will be a dream of beauty; long, impressive vistas; beautiful villas, artistic homes...whatever there is of civic incongruities will be wiped out. It will be called Presidents Avenue..."<sup>38</sup>

Mary Henderson's crusade to "improve" Sixteenth Street and make it an architecturally sophisticated thoroughfare was initially primarily one of public speaking, written editorials, and Congressional lobbying. Through this activist approach, Henderson realized only modest success, but in the process became an important and recognized figure on Capitol Hill. Probably the most well-known of her lobbying campaigns was having the name of Sixteenth Street

<sup>37</sup> "Henderson Castle Wine Cellar Episode Work of Rechabite Butler," *The Washington Post*, June 10, 1906, M-2.

<sup>38</sup> Needless to say, in promoting her grand scheme, Mary Henderson had little regard for the fate of the mostly African American inhabitants of the frame houses of Meridian Hill. Her many articles and speeches on the subject never refer to what would happen to the community after the condemnation of their homes.

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changed, albeit temporarily, to “Avenue of the Presidents.”<sup>39</sup> In keeping with her vision for a monumental gateway to the city, Henderson commissioned architects to design public buildings and monuments on Meridian Hill; she planted trees and shrubs along the avenue; and ultimately constructed an impressive array of residential buildings that today forms the core of the Meridian Hill neighborhood. As such, her campaign evolved beyond pontification into a more significant and effective hands-on development project that she and her husband pursued together.

Mary Henderson’s initial proposals to the federal government for major monuments met with little success. In 1898 when there was some talk of building a new, larger White House, Henderson personally engaged architect Paul Pelz to design a new Executive Mansion on Meridian Hill. She then presented the drawings to Congress, “indulging the hope that these drawings may appeal to the judgment and fancy of your honorable bodies...” In an accompanying report to Congress, Henderson highlighted the many advantages she saw in placing the Executive Mansion on Meridian Hill. In particular, she touted the views of the city, the prevailing winds of summer, the country air, proximity to Rock Creek Park, and adjacency to “what will, in the future, be one of the finest avenues in the country...”<sup>40</sup> Two years later, Henderson aligned herself behind another architect, Franklin W. Smith, who similarly approached Congress with the idea of building a presidential mansion on Meridian Hill. Although neither proposal was favored by Congress, her presentations to members to Congress and her efforts in beautifying the city made Henderson a well-known and respected figure on Capitol Hill.

In 1911, Henderson began to petition Congress to consider Meridian Hill for the site of the proposed Lincoln Memorial, rather than the Potomac River site favored by the Commission of Fine Arts. This time, Mary Henderson hired the architectural firm of Murphy and Olmsted to prepare plans for a Lincoln memorial. In 1912, with the completed drawings and written declaration in hand, Mrs. Henderson made her case before Congress and in editorial appeals to the Washington Post. Her argument in favor of the Meridian Hill site for an arch to honor Lincoln remained much the same as for her promotion of the White House, with the additional appeal that the Lincoln arch at Meridian Hill “may sooner or later be on the line of roadway which will connect the White House with the Gettysburg Park” through the extension of 16th Street due north for 60 miles!<sup>41</sup> Even after the Commission of Fine Arts had selected the Potomac Park site for the Lincoln Memorial, Henderson continued to promote Meridian Hill for her Lincoln Arch.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> After legislation passed in March 1913 to change the street’s name, Congress then restored its original name the following year during a time when Mary Henderson was reputedly absent from the city.

<sup>40</sup> Mary F. Henderson, “Proposed Executive Mansion,” Letter to the Congress, dated 1898.

<sup>41</sup> Mary F. Henderson, “Proposed Lincoln Memorial for Meridian Hill,” Letter to Congress, [1909]. See also, “Favors Meridian Hill: Writer Tells Why Lincoln Arch Should be Put There,” *The Washington Post*, 1/18/1909, p. 12.

<sup>42</sup> “Suggests Memorial Arch: Mrs. M.F. Henderson Would Have Gettysburg Portal on Meridian Hill,” *The Washington Post*, 8/7/1911, p. 12.

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### Meridian Hill Park

Just prior to her Lincoln Memorial loss, Mary Henderson celebrated an important victory that was a key element in her beautification plan for Sixteenth Street and the beginning of the transformation of Meridian Hill. In 1910, after much lobbying on Henderson's part, Congress passed an Act to purchase twelve acres on Meridian Hill for use as a park.<sup>43</sup> Henderson had been promoting the acreage as a "Washington Parc Monceau," noting the site's opportunities for terracing, cascades, decorative steps, and, most notably, "incomparable views." The most compelling argument for Congress, however, may have been one of practicality and economics more than aesthetics: The widening of Sixteenth Street beyond Florida Avenue around 1900 to its full breadth<sup>44</sup> had created a deep and unnatural ravine-like roadbed with a rugged cliff bordering its eastern edge. According to Henderson and her appeals to Congress, the road widening rendered the hilltop of Meridian Hill "impractical for private use" and thus reduced its inherent redevelopment value. Henderson convincingly argued that the land was available at "low cost" and its vicissitudes of topography had great design value.<sup>45</sup> The president of the Board of Commissioners, Henry B. MacFarland, strongly supported the purchase of land, noting that there were no parks north of Florida Avenue and that such a park would greatly enhance the beauty of the city and "would add greatly to the beauty of the Sixteenth Street boulevard..."<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the resultant Meridian Hill Park—a grand and formal park designed in the manner of the greatest European city parks—is an exceptional public park and a unique resource in this city.

Completion of the park—including the condemnation and removal of the houses that were home to a sizeable African American population—took years and might not have been completed without the persistence of Henderson. Through a series of setbacks including a turnover of designers and escalating costs, Mary Henderson successfully persuaded Congress to fulfill its appropriation of funds and continue the design and construction of the park until its completion in 1926. As described in *Sixteenth Street Architecture*, the park is designed as a "French Renaissance esplanade overlooking a grotto, cascade and terrace in the Italianate manner."<sup>47</sup>

The 1910 commitment by the government to construct Meridian Hill Park must have given the Hendersons added confidence for their own development projects on Meridian Hill.

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<sup>43</sup> Secondary sources indicate that Congress purchased the land from Mrs. Henderson; however, assessment records from the period indicate that only one of the lots condemned for government acquisition was owned by Mrs. Henderson (Lot 2 of Square 2573). The other owners of the lot appear to be the African American residents of the modest frame houses on the site.

<sup>44</sup> County Book 18/1-3, August 1902 in the District Surveyor's Office provides a plat for the widening of 16th Street above Florida Avenue. See also County Book 17/78 and County Book 8/74.

<sup>45</sup> As noted in the introduction in this document, there is no indication that Henderson had any concern for the effects that her redevelopment plans would have on the then-residents of Meridian Hill. No consideration appears to have been paid to the African Americans living in the frame houses atop Meridian Hill during the condemnation proceedings.

<sup>46</sup> "Land in Hall and Elvan's Subdivision of Meridian Hill, District of Columbia, for Public Park, Senate Bill 7725, May 20, 1910, Calendar No. 681, 61st Congress, 2nd Session, Report No 725.

<sup>47</sup> *Sixteenth Street Architecture*, p. 330.

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Since building Henderson's Castle, the Hendersons had been systematically purchasing lots within the Hall and Elvans' subdivision until they eventually controlled most of the frontage of Sixteenth Street across from and north of the proposed Meridian Hill Park, as well as a good portion of Fifteenth Street across the east side of the park.<sup>48</sup> On these lots and in an effort to fulfill her vision of a grand Sixteenth Street boulevard, Mrs. Henderson and her husband began to speculatively build large and impressive residences with the intention of selling or renting them to foreign governments as embassies. Where they didn't build themselves, the Hendersons sold their lots to appropriately vetted purchasers who proposed construction of comparably scaled and executed buildings that fit their established model.

In two principal phases between 1905-1910 and 1920-1930, the Hendersons (Mary Henderson alone after John Henderson's death in 1913) built thirteen residential buildings along Fifteenth and Sixteenth Streets within the larger Meridian Hill area that were either sold or rented as private residences or embassies. Ten of these mansions still stand, including eight in the heart of Meridian Hill and located within the Meridian Hill Historic District. For all of these buildings, Mary Henderson hired Washington, D.C. architect George Oakely Totten, Jr. A highly talented architect, Totten designed the manses in a variety of styles, yet executed them all in a grand Beaux Arts tradition that he had learned during his studies at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris.

The Hendersons concentrated their initial building projects along the west side of Sixteenth Street, north of their own house and across from, but still north of the proposed site of Meridian Hill Park. The first house erected on Meridian Hill by the Henderson is the fanciful Venetian palazzo-inspired dwelling usually referred to as the "Pink Palace" since it was, at one time during its history, painted pink. Located at 2600 16th Street, just north of Euclid Street, the Pink Palace stands at the height of the hill, where it served, as an impressive landmark on the way to the White House. Upon its completion in 1906, Mrs. Henderson found a renter in the likes of Oscar Strauss, Secretary of Commerce and Labor in the Theodore Roosevelt administration. Strauss clearly either believed in the potential of Sixteenth Street as promoted by Mary Henderson, or simply enjoyed the house's lonely splendor along a still rugged avenue.

Almost immediately after completion of the Venetian palace residence, the Hendersons began filling in the lots around it.<sup>49</sup> In 1907, they built the first legation building on the street at 2460 16th Street after Ambassador M. Jules Jusserand complained to Mary Henderson about crowded quarters at the French Embassy on S Street. In her effort to populate the street, Henderson fulfilled her offer to build a new building for the French government on Meridian Hill.<sup>50</sup> The

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<sup>48</sup> Although it seems that most of the development effort belongs to Mary Henderson, assessment records indicate that many of the lots were in Mr. John Henderson's name alone, while others were in Mary Henderson's name alone.

<sup>49</sup> The Hendersons are also known to have remodeled at least one pre-existing home (no longer extant), using the design services of Roger and Totten. See "Remodeled Home for Congressman," *The Washington Times*, December 31, 1905.

<sup>50</sup> "Washington Renaissance: Architecture and Landscape of Meridian Hill," Meridian House International: Washington, D.C., n.d., p. 7.

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resultant classically inspired Beaux Arts style mansion with its rounded corner tower, Mansard roof with prominent dormers, iron roof cresting and other very French details, is recognized as one of George Oakley Totten's finest works.

The Hendersons built their next two projects—the large Spanish-inspired duplex at 2620 and 2622 16th Street<sup>51</sup> and the present-day Embassy of Poland at 2640 16th Street—as speculative ventures. Upon their completion, the buildings were all soon occupied as embassies by the Danish, Swedish and Polish governments, respectively, indicating that Mary Henderson was already achieving a certain level of success on her Meridian Hill project.<sup>52</sup> At the time of the construction of 2640 16th Street, the local press hailed the continuing improvements along the street,

“When the new embassy is completed there will be no other portion of the city where such a variety of architecture can be found in such close proximity. The Venetian palazzo, the French renaissance, the Spanish renaissance, and the classic styles will then be seen side by side in the palatial homes which form the fast-growing diplomatic center. The new addition will be the most northern of the group, and adjoining it on the south will be the magnificent double structure which comprises the residences of the Danish and Swedish ministers...”<sup>53</sup>

A fifth, unrealized house project on Sixteenth Street continued the stylistic variation of the street. In 1909, Totten designed a tall five-story Elizabethan-style dwelling for Mary Henderson who planned to build it on three lots at 2630 16th Street, perhaps with the British in mind. Planned for the site between the “Spanish” duplex and the classically inspired Beaux Arts-style embassy at 2640 16th Street (Embassy of Poland), renderings of the designed building appeared in the local press, with headlines noting the “Proposed addition to Legation Center.”<sup>54</sup> Mary Henderson never built this house however, opting instead to sell the three lots to the Republic of Cuba, which in 1916 built its own embassy on the site. Rather than using already prepared plans, the Cuban government hired architects MacNeil & MacNeil to design a Classically inspired, limestone-clad building. Then Cuban ambassador, Dr. Carlos Manuel de Cespedes chose the French Beaux Arts style over a uniquely Spanish style, noting “classicism belongs to the whole world, while the Spanish style is of only one nation.”<sup>55</sup> The Cuban government has occupied this building uninterrupted since it moved there in 1916.

<sup>51</sup> 2620 16th Street has been demolished, leaving only the northern half of duplex extant.

<sup>52</sup> Upon its completion, the building at 2640 16th Street was purchased by Poland for use as an embassy building, which endures today. In terms of the immediate sale of the building and its enduring use as an embassy, this building can be considered the ultimate fulfillment of Mary Henderson's desired goal of converting 16th Street into a stately boulevard of foreign legations and embassy buildings.

<sup>53</sup> “New Diplomatic Home,” *The Washington Post*, January 24, 1909, p. CA-1.

<sup>54</sup> “Home for a Diplomat,” *The Washington Post*, April 11, 1909, p. A-2.

<sup>55</sup> “Cuban Legation Home,” *The Washington Post*, November 19, 1916, p. R2.

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### Henderson-Inspired Developments

The new Cuban Embassy fit seamlessly along the street and likely provided Mary Henderson with some assurance that her vision for an embassy-lined corridor to the White House had finally come to fruition. Other buildings—either directly or indirectly associated with the Hendersons—emerged in the area, securing the elite, enclave-like nature of Meridian Hill. In particular, in 1909, Henry White, a distinguished diplomat and acquaintance of the Hendersons, made plans to build a house near theirs on Meridian Hill. His house site—high on the hill overlooking the city—was the same one that Joaquin Miller had chosen for his log cabin two decades earlier. It was also just west of Sixteenth Street and directly across from the site that Mary Henderson had been promoting for Meridian Hill Park. With the enhanced value of his site thus almost assured, Henry White hired nationally known architect John Russell Pope to design his forty-room brick mansion on today's Crescent Place. Mrs. Henderson followed construction of the Henry White house with great interest. In June 1910, Henry White recounted in a letter to his wife,

“Mrs Henderson came on the lot yesterday when I was taking Mrs. Hay up there and ‘visited with us’ for a brief period. She says interest in the neighborhood has increased since we began to build and she seemed generally chirpy and cheerful...”

Two years later, Mary Henderson sold two lots adjacent to the White's Crescent Place house to Henry White's friend, Irwin Boyle Laughlin. Although the Laughlins did not immediately build upon their land, they eventually did so, securing for themselves the same famous architect as their neighbor and enhancing the cachet of the unique Crescent Place enclave.

At the same time that the Whites were building on Crescent Place, Mrs. Emily Eames MacVeagh, the wife of Franklin MacVeagh, Secretary of the Treasury during the Taft administration, was secretly building the stately limestone-clad Renaissance Revival-style house that now serves as the Mexican Cultural Center at 2829 16th Street. When the MacVeaghs moved to D.C. in 1909, they first rented the Venetian Gothic (“Pink Palace”) from the Hendersons. But, as recounted in period press, they soon decided they should have their own house and Emily MacVeagh secretly purchased the lots on Sixteenth Street from several owners including the Hendersons. She then hired architect Nathan Wyeth to design the house, swearing him to secrecy, in a plan to present the house to her husband as a Christmas gift.<sup>56</sup> Although later newspaper accounts and local tradition hold that Emily MacVeagh did indeed surprise her husband, another period account indicates that within ten months, Mrs. MacVeagh's secret had been revealed, and her surprise gift to her husband foiled:

“Secretary of the Treasury MacVeagh is to receive what probably will be the most expensive Christmas gift, or at least one of the most costly, ever given in Washington. The present is a beautiful home, costing about \$250,000, now in

<sup>56</sup> *Sixteenth Street Architecture*, p. 485-486.

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course of construction on Sixteenth Street...Mrs. McVeagh is having the house constructed for her husband, and it is to be presented to him on Christmas day. Mrs. MacVeagh tried to keep the intention a secret, wanting to surprise her husband, and she doubtless would have been successful had not persons who wondered who it was that was building the handsome house on Sixteenth Street investigated and disclosed the facts.”<sup>57</sup>

In 1921, several years after the death of Mrs. McVeagh and renting the house out, the heartbroken Mr. McVeagh sold the house to Mexico for use as the Mexican Embassy.

The Hendersons’ own building projects, along with those facilitated by them, had within the short five-year period between 1905 and 1910 greatly altered the nature of Meridian Hill. The newly paved Sixteenth Street north of Florida Avenue then boasted several of the city’s grandest mansions, whose residents formed a veritable who’s who in diplomatic Washington. And yet, immediately across from these mansions on the several blocks that would become Meridian Hill Park, there still existed an African American enclave, perhaps creating one of the greatest architectural and socio-economic dichotomies in the city.

#### Changing Landscapes: Meridian Hill in the 1910s and 1920s

As the newcomers to Meridian Hill were settling into their luxury mansions, the long-time African-American residents were being displaced from their “shacks.” Construction of Meridian Hill Park, approved by an Act of Congress in 1910, required, firstly, condemnation of the land and, secondly, removal of those buildings occupying the land. Although there is little to no newspaper coverage of this displacement, photographs of a number of the dwellings lining Fifteenth Street were taken, documenting the buildings, if not the lives of those occupying them. Census records provide some insight into what had been a thriving community of employed working-class African Americans, the majority of whom owned their Meridian Hill homes. While no newspaper coverage of the demolition of these houses, or the upheaval of the residents’ lives could be found in local newspapers, a 1915 article does note the demolition of the “mansion” (the Porter-era secondary dwelling) on Meridian Hill and acknowledges the passing of the last vestige of the early history of Meridian Hill.

Following the 1913 death of her husband, Mrs. Henderson slowed her building campaign on Meridian Hill. As construction of the park ensued, however, other developers sought to capitalize on the fledgling Meridian Hill scene. In 1915, the Kennedy Brothers purchased land on Sixteenth Street across from the park and constructed Meridian Mansions (now The Envoy), a large, but elegant luxury apartment building. Upon its completion, the press exclaimed over the building, noting its “every comfort” including separate chauffeurs’ and servants’ quarters (see below). Meridian Mansions was soon home to several “high officials” including U.S. Senators and the Chief Justice of the Court of Appeals.

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<sup>57</sup> “Secretary’s Wife Building Mansion for Him as Christmas Present,” *The Washington Post*, September 27, 1910.



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Around the same time, George Oakley Totten, Jr. began construction of his own studio/house on Meridian Hill. Totten purchased a series of lots<sup>58</sup> mid-block between Euclid and Fuller Streets that ran the full depth of the square with frontage on both 15th and 16th Streets. Thereupon he built a charming English Arts & Crafts-inspired dwelling set within a heavily landscaped and picturesque garden. He oriented the house with its gable ends toward the street, with its front façade facing south, and with a large and formal garden between the house and Sixteenth Street. Totten and his artist wife, who had a separate studio building for her art, enjoyed a tranquil country-like existence within walking distance of the city.

### Henderson's Meridian Hill: Phase Two

During the 1920s, after her Meridian Hill building hiatus, Mary Henderson re-vitalized her building campaign and encouraged the construction of several more Meridian Hill buildings. While her most newsworthy endeavor during the 1920s involved construction of the building at 2801 16th Street which she proposed as a mansion for the vice president, but which was refused, her principal efforts were focused along Fifteenth Street. There, she built two major buildings and inspired the construction of others. In addition, Mary Henderson continued to buy and sell real estate. Of particular note, in the early 1920s, she sold a prominent corner lot at the southeast corner of Fifteenth and Euclid Streets to the Netherlands upon which that government built its embassy/chancery building, and she sold another strategic series of lots at Sixteenth and Fuller to Italy where the Italians built their embassy building. In addition, she sold several parcels of her land on the north side of Euclid Street at the head of the Park to the French government, where the French planned, but never executed, a new embassy building and chancery.<sup>59</sup> Had the French Embassy building, designed by architect Paul Cret at the head of the park been executed, it would likely have fully satisfied Mary Henderson's complete vision for Meridian Hill.

Still, between 1921 and 1927, Mary Henderson continued to purchase several parcels of land along Fifteenth Street across from Meridian Hill Park between Florida Avenue and Clifton Streets. Based upon these land purchases, it appears that Mary Henderson intended to develop the full length of the park along Fifteenth Street, but was stymied by her death in 1931.<sup>60</sup>

In all of these efforts, Mary Henderson continued to pursue her quest to attract the political elite and develop a true diplomatic center on Meridian Hill. Most notably, she built the mansion at 2801 16th Street in 1922-23 with the intention of donating it to the federal government for use as a vice presidential mansion. Despite her formal offer, Congress refused it, considering the house too expensive for a vice president to maintain on his salary.<sup>61</sup> Mrs. Henderson thus sought a

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<sup>58</sup> The lots purchased by George Oakley Totten, Jr. were not owned by the Hendersons.

<sup>59</sup> See "Resume Building on 'Embassy Row,'" *The Evening Star*, 4/9/1927, p. 30. This article includes a drawing of the proposed French chancery building planned for a site on the east side of 15th Street at Euclid Street (present site of Hilltop House). The article notes that the site between 15th and 16th Streets at Euclid was being proposed by the French for a more "elaborate" embassy. Tax assessment records corroborate that those lots of land, previously owned by Mary Henderson, were sold to the French government between 1921 and 1927.

<sup>60</sup> A comparison of the Real Estate Assessment records for 1921-22 and 1927-28 show that Mary Henderson continued to acquire lots along 15th Street within that interim.

<sup>61</sup> *Sixteenth Street Architecture*, Vol. 1, p. 463.

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purchaser; she initially approached the government of Mexico, but the Mexicans chose instead to buy the McVeagh house next door for their embassy. The residence at 2801 remained vacant until 1926 when it was purchased by Spain and was adapted for use as that country's embassy and chancery.

Mrs. Henderson's land sales in this period resulted in two other important new embassies on Meridian Hill: the Embassy of Italy and the Embassy of the Netherlands. Although it is not known if Henderson pressured then-ambassador Gelasio Caetani to purchase her Meridian Hill lots for its first purpose-built embassy building, it is surely not co-incidental that simultaneous to the 1923-24 sale of her 16th Street land, Henderson purchased the former Italian Embassy building at 1400 New Hampshire Avenue (the former Hearst mansion) from the Italian government.<sup>62</sup> Like Cuba a decade earlier, Italy engaged its own design team, in this case Warren and Wetmore, the prominent New York architectural firm responsible for the design of Grand Central Station. It is thought, however, that Ambassador Caetani, an architect by training, had a strong hand in the design of the Renaissance Revival-style palazzo.<sup>63</sup>

As the upper terrace of Meridian Hill Park was nearing completion, Henderson set her sights on expanding her Embassy Row to Fifteenth Street and found her first opportunity with the Dutch. In August 1921, the government of the Netherlands had acquired lots at the southeast corner of Fifteenth and Euclid streets from Henderson and was actively engaged in building an embassy on the site.<sup>64</sup> This large, five-story Beaux Arts building was apparently designed by George Oakley Totten, but in collaboration with an Amsterdam architect named only as Professor Van der Steur, according to a period newspaper article.<sup>65</sup> The embassy and chancery building was completed by October 1922, when the minister from the Netherlands moved into the new quarters.<sup>66</sup>

With a new embassy in place on Fifteenth Street, Henderson followed up with the heavy stone Tudor edifice at 2401 15th Street.<sup>67</sup> Constructed in 1923, the building became home to the Egyptian Legation in 1927, after having sat vacant for some time.<sup>68</sup> Four years later, the Henderson-Totten team completed the house at 2437 15th Street which served as the American Legion Club for many years before becoming the Hungarian Legation.<sup>69</sup>

Just north of Euclid Street along 15th Street, Mrs. Henderson apparently became engaged in the construction of the Meridian Hill Studio Apartments (see below), fleshing out the eastern side of

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<sup>62</sup> *Sixteenth Street Architecture*, p. 435.

<sup>63</sup> *Sixteenth Street Architecture*, p. 435.

<sup>64</sup> "Three Envoys Buy Homes in Capital: Netherlands Erecting Beautiful Structure on Grounds Secured at 15th and Euclid Streets, N.W.," *The Washington Post*, August 21, 1921.

<sup>65</sup> "Washington's Hill of Diplomats Rises," *The New York Times*, July 19, 1925, SM5.

<sup>66</sup> "Holland Claims Elegant New Legation," *The Washington Post*, October 27, 1922.

<sup>67</sup> Listed in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites, 1990 and in the National Register of Historic Places, 1991.

<sup>68</sup> The building was constructed speculatively and completed in 1923. It sat vacant until 1927 when the Egyptian government rented it as its embassy headquarters.

<sup>69</sup> City directories actually list Mrs. Henderson as the occupant of the building in 1931, though there is no other indication that she was living there, rather than at Henderson Castle. After that and until at least 1948, the American Legion Club occupied the building. By 1954, it had become the Hungarian Embassy.

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the upper reaches of Meridian Hill. Architecturally, George Oakley Totten continued the stylistic eclecticism of Meridian Hill by introducing the Arts and Crafts style Meridian Hill Studios, the Tudor Revival Style mansion at 2401 25th Street, and the Mediterranean-style villa at 2437 15th Street into the larger mix.

With the expectation that the French government would be building a new embassy and chancery at the head of the park, and that Henderson would continue to build upon her newly acquired 15th Street lots, Mary Henderson surely must have felt that her vision for Meridian Hill was truly reaching maturity. In 1931, before this vision had fully culminated, however, Mary Henderson died, leaving a series of undeveloped lots along the lower stretch of 15th Street, across from Meridian Hill Park. These lots would eventually be built upon by speculative developers who acquired the land after Mrs. Henderson's death, completing projects that would likely not have met with her approval.

### Beyond Mansions: The Apartments and Churches of Meridian Hill

Despite the preponderance of mansions from the first decades of the 20th century, Meridian Hill is, today, characterized as much by its apartment buildings and clustering of churches as it is by its mansions. The majority of Meridian Hill's apartment buildings were constructed in the 20-year period between the 1920s and the 1940s, following the 1920 establishment of zoning regulations in the city that codified the allowance of multi-story apartment buildings along 16th Street to Piney Branch Road, and following the death of Mrs. Henderson.<sup>70</sup> Several earlier apartment buildings, however, provided an important precedent for the building type on Meridian Hill. Architecturally, the apartment buildings of Meridian Hill are large-scale, multi-story buildings that together dominate the mansions that had previously ruled the streetscape. Socio-economically, many of the Meridian Hill apartment buildings offered luxury living to the same type of wealthy and sophisticated residents who occupied the area's mansions.

The first apartment buildings to be erected in the larger Meridian Hill vicinity both inside and outside the proposed historic district boundaries were constructed in the first decade of the 20th century: the Kenesaw Apartments (now La Renaissance) at 16th Street north of Columbia Road; the Earlington Apartments (now the Claiborne Apartments) across the street from the Kenesaw; and the Cavendish Apartments (demolished) just south of Columbia Road at Mozart Place. All of these were built as speculative ventures whose developers were banking on the northerly migration of the city's population and the increasing acceptance of apartment building living. Of particular note here is that John Henderson—eager to either capitalize on the future success of his wife's ambitious plans for Meridian Hill, or to help it achieve this success—was one of seven initial investors in the Kenesaw apartment building project.<sup>71</sup> Despite initial opposition to the

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<sup>70</sup> The 1936 amendments to the zoning regulations restricted apartment buildings along 16th Street above Piney Branch Road.

<sup>71</sup> The Kenesaw was completed in 1905, after resolution of a contentious land issue involving the initial seven investors and Congress. Senators William Stewart and Jacob Gallinger and Roswell Bishop introduced joint bills to take the triangular plot of land by eminent domain. The representatives felt that the elevated site should be reserved for a public park, supposedly to encourage the development of 16th Street as a fashionable residential corridor, and

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project from Congress that sought to block the building's construction, the Kenesaw Apartment building opened as a rental apartment in 1906. When completed, the building dominated the still undeveloped area, occupying its strategic triangular site at the intersection of old 16th Street (today's Mt. Pleasant Street), the new-cut 16th Street and Columbia Road. Two years later, prominent developer Harry Wardman built the Claiborne Apartments, just south of and across 16th Street from the Kenesaw.

During this period, apartment building construction restricted itself to the periphery of Meridian Hill as the Hendersons held somewhat of a monopoly on Meridian Hill development. In 1915, for instance, when Harry Wardman sought to build three apartment buildings on land that he had purchased at the northeast corner of 15th and Euclid Streets, Mrs. Henderson intervened to stop it. Rather than allow the construction of the apartment buildings that would have overlooked the upper terrace of Meridian Hill Park, Mrs. Henderson negotiated to trade the 15th and Euclid streets land for several lots that she owned at the corner of 17th and Willard Streets. Upon this new site, Harry Wardman constructed the Willard Courts apartment building. Following the successful land transaction, Mary Henderson expressed relief that the park was "now protected from any surrounding which could fall below a certain standard of beauty."<sup>72</sup>

Despite Henderson's efforts to eliminate the proposed Wardman apartments, another real estate deal completed within months of the Wardman-Henderson trade actually resulted in the construction of the first apartment building in the heart of Meridian Hill. In May 1915, on land previously owned by the Hendersons on the west side of 16th Street and across from the Meridian Hill Park site, then-owner Dr. Zachariah T. Sowers gave his 16th Street land to the Kennedy Brothers builders in exchange for the existing Argyle Apartment building at 17th Street and Park Road. At the time of the trade, the *Evening Star* surmised that "a large apartment may be built."<sup>73</sup> Indeed, within the year, the Kennedy Brothers had constructed Meridian Mansions Apartment building—an Alexander H. Sonneman-designed apartment described in period advertisements as an apartment "de luxe." Erection of the Meridian Mansions apartments contributed in populating Meridian Hill with socially prominent individuals, thereby adding to the neighborhood's cachet.<sup>74</sup>

In 1919, immediately following the completion of the eight-story Meridian Mansions, developers of the Hadleigh (Roosevelt) Apartments at the south end of Meridian Hill proposed an even taller eight-story structure that drew the ire of Mary Henderson. As designed by architect Appleton P. Clark, the Hadleigh Apartment included an elaborate roof garden with vine-covered pergolas on

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sought to take the land through eminent domain. Either scenario would have benefited Mr. Henderson. See James Goode, *Best Addresses*, p. 55.

<sup>72</sup> "Acquires Wardman Holding to Block Apartment Plans; Mrs. John B. Henderson Obtains Property at 15th and Euclid Streets Northwest Facing Proposed Meridian Hill Park." *The Evening Star*, January 9, 1915, p. 4. See also, "Two Apartment buildings Planned by Harry Wardman," *The Evening Star*, January 9, 1915, p. 4; and Mark Andrich, "The Impact of Zoning on Apartment House Development, Washington, D.C., 1920-1985," (unpublished paper), n.d.

<sup>73</sup> "Acquires Apartment Site on 16th Street," *The Evening Star*, May 5, 1915, p. 2-2; and Dr. Z.T. Sowers Acquires Argyle Apartment in Trade," *The Evening Star*, May 5, 1915, p. 2-3.

<sup>74</sup> See "Has Many Innovations," *The Washington Post*, 7/23/1916, p. RE5; and "Richman's Rental is Aired at Hearing," *The Washington Post*, November 23, 1921.

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the three central wings of the eight-story building. Mrs. Henderson objected to the building's height, claiming it would block the view of the city from Meridian Hill Park. She thus used her influence in Congress to have the already issued building permit revoked. In her Congressional testimony, Henderson argued that the view from Meridian Hill Park was "the only one remaining in the capital" and is comparable to similar outlooks in Paris and Rome, which she claimed "have been preserved for posterity."<sup>75</sup> Clarence Moore, chairman of the Fine Arts Commission, joined in on the objection thereby convincing Congress to pass a bill that limited the height of the Hadleigh. As a result, the apartment building was constructed, but without its roof pergolas—something often lamented by architectural historians today. Mary Henderson's efforts ultimately resulted in passage of the zoning laws that limited the height of buildings in residentially zoned neighborhoods city-wide. In a 1925 interview, Henderson noted, "All modern cities maintain a skyline, but until we brought Congressional action to a focus on the zoning law that restricts the height of buildings in residence sections to six stories private property owners here in Washington had no assurance that tall apartment houses would not be built, reducing their homes to pigmies."<sup>76</sup>

### The Influence of Zoning Regulations on Meridian Hill

In 1920 and in large part due to outcries such as that over the Hadleigh Apartments, the city adopted its first zoning regulations. These zoning regulations established Height, Area, and Use districts throughout the city. In particular the regulations called for Residential Use districts in an effort to eliminate unwanted commercial and industrial uses within residential areas. This Residential Use district was unrestricted, however, allowing for apartment buildings and rooming houses alongside single-family dwellings. According to the 1920 Use maps, 16th Street was designated Residential from the White House north to the city's border with Montgomery County.

As apartment building living became more acceptable to the middle- and upper-class residents, the number of families that lived in apartments city-wide increased from 15% to 50% in the five-year period between 1920 and 1925. Apartment buildings, with their accompanying investment potential, appealed to speculative developers, and thus quickly became Washington's prime real estate venture. As apartment building construction intensified, local opposition, such as that of Mary Henderson grew towards uncontrolled apartment house construction. In response to the vocal opposition, the city introduced changes to the 1920 zoning regulations in 1924, 1928, and again in 1936, creating stricter classifications for residential and commercial uses.

Mrs. Henderson played an active role in fighting for restricted zoning regulations along 16th Street. However, rather than argue for restricted residential use along the street, her battle focused on keeping commercial uses off of lower 16th Street, which was then a serious threat.

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<sup>75</sup> "Mrs. Henderson Asks for Ban on Tall Buildings," *The Evening Star*, October 28, 1919, p. 12. See also, "Would Cut Height of the Hadleigh," *The Washington Post*, November 2, 1919, p. 16; "Apartment Hotel Nears Completion," *The Washington Post*, August 29, 1920; "Huge \$2,000,000 Apartment Hotel to be Erected on 16th Street," *The Washington Post*, August 10, 1919; "Bill to Limit Height of Apartment House," *The Evening Star*, September 5, 1919, p. 27.

<sup>76</sup> "Washington's Hill of Diplomats Rises," *The New York Times*, 7/19/1925, p. SM5.

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She believed oversized buildings reflected commercial greed, resulting in a street disease called “pulmonary consumption of residential avenues.”<sup>77</sup> Continuing to petition for the prestige she believed Sixteenth Street warranted, Henderson published a booklet entitled *Remarks About Management of Washington in General and Sixteenth Street in Particular* (1927)<sup>78</sup> that consisted of her testimony before Congressional committees of the District of Columbia, as well as several letters she had written to the editor of the Washington Post.

As a result of her efforts, the entire Sixteenth Street from the White House to the county line remained “Residential” in the 1924, 1928 and 1936 amendments.<sup>79</sup> This designation, though, remained unrestricted south of Piney Branch, thereby allowing for apartment building construction along both 15th and 16th Streets. Recognizing the gaining popularity of apartment buildings and wishing to present a low-density model on the edge of Meridian Hill Park, Henderson built the 1922 Meridian Hill Studios. Designed by Totten, the two-story stucco-clad complex with a verdant courtyard facing 15th Street and the Park was conceived as a 13-unit, luxury-type apartment building for artists and bachelors. Although several luxury apartments had been built in Manhattan at the turn-of-the-century for artists, no such model existed in Washington. The building remains unique, with studio and larger apartments offering double-height ceilings and ceramic tile murals above fireplace mantels designed by the architect’s wife, Swedish sculptor Mrs. Vicken von Post Totten. The ceramic tiles were fired in Mrs. Totten’s kiln across the street at her home and studio.

Shortly after designing Meridian Hill Studios, George Oakley Totten began reconstruction of the H.H. Richardson-designed Warder mansion on his own property across 15th Street from the studio apartments. Totten re-designed the interior of the rebuilt mansion, which he called Richardson Apartments, with the intention of accommodating a foreign legation on the first story and luxury apartments on the floors above.

As expected, other developers introduced their own apartment buildings on Meridian Hill on those few sites not owned by Mary Henderson. These buildings, if not modeled stylistically after Henderson’s low-lying ideal, were designed as luxurious apartments with the wealthy in mind. In fact, the six-story apartment building at 1661 Crescent Place,<sup>80</sup> built in 1925, offered the city’s costliest apartments, ranging in price from \$6,000 for efficiencies to \$29,000 for the largest seven-room apartments.<sup>81</sup> The apartments were also planned for entertaining with access between foyers, drawing rooms, and dining rooms via elegant archways. Most of the owners of 1661 Crescent Place were members of the city’s most elite professional class—military officers, foreign service officers, senators, journalists and other notables.

As long as Mary Henderson was alive, it seems, apartment building construction on Meridian Hill was held in check. In the decade between 1920 and 1931, only five apartment buildings

<sup>77</sup> Kohler and Carson, *Sixteenth Street Architecture*, Volume 1, p. 345.

<sup>78</sup> Copy found in the vertical files of the Historical Society of Washington

<sup>79</sup> In 1936, the zoning regulations altered the earlier regulations in that the residential use above Piney Branch was designated “restricted” and allowed for single-family residential buildings, only.

<sup>80</sup> Mrs. Henderson objected to the height of 1661 Crescent Place, NW. See DC Permit to Build #4133 (11/5/1925).

<sup>81</sup> James Goode, *Best Addresses*, p. 244.

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were constructed in the heart of Meridian Hill. However, after the 1931 death of Henderson, apartment building development on Meridian Hill intensified. This was clearly due to the building trends of the period, but also to the newly available land on Meridian Hill and with the relaxed restrictions that came with the death of Mary Henderson. Without any heirs, Henderson's undeveloped Meridian Hill land parcels eventually came on the open market.<sup>82</sup> These vacant lots as well as the area's prime location just beyond the center city where housing shortages were running high provided a ripe opportunity for apartment building construction. Clearly, without the objections of Mrs. Henderson, developers felt free to exercise their zoning rights. This sentiment is made apparent in the surviving correspondence between a realtor seeking to sell the Hadleigh Apartment building and a potential purchaser in New York:

"The building was originally planned for a roof garden but this plan was blocked by a wealthy land owner whose private residence was on the adjacent corner. This person has since died and her estate would interpose no objections."<sup>83</sup>

In an effort to capitalize on and perpetuate the socially prominent character of Meridian Hill, the various apartment building developers continued to provide amenities that were only available to persons of means. Even during the lean times of the Depression, Meridian Hill apartment living held to certain standards. For instance, the Embassy Towers apartment building, constructed in 1931, boasted "ultra modern apartments" and "all night elevator service" along with its location in Washington's "exclusive embassy section."<sup>84</sup> Later, the expansive Dorchester House (1941) advertised its uniformed doorman service, parking, air conditioning, and a roof deck with incomparable views of the entire city. In its early years before World War II, the building indeed counted numerous prominent residents amongst its 394 apartments.

Although the apartment building developers helped maintain a certain social elitism on Meridian Hill by building luxurious buildings, they also began to alter the low-density character of Meridian Hill by maximizing the buildings' zoning potential in terms of height. During the 1930s, most of the apartment buildings erected on 16th Street and facing Meridian Hill Park rose at least five stories in height, with some, such as the Diplomat<sup>85</sup> and the Dorchester Apartments rising even higher. Along 15th Street, some smaller-scale apartment buildings, and even several row houses were built following Mrs. Henderson's death, but these did not begin to attract the wealthy residents that continued to occupy 16th Street apartments. In fact, one particular development company, the 15th Street Heights Corporation, built a number of speculative buildings along the lower stretch of 15th Street that are in-period, but out of character with the rest of the Meridian Hill historic district.

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<sup>82</sup> Based upon a spate of building in 1936-37 on lots formerly owned by Mary. Henderson, it is likely that the execution of her estate was not complete until then.

<sup>83</sup> James Goode, *Best Addresses*.

<sup>84</sup> See advertisements for the Embassy Towers in *The Washington Post*, September 16, 1931 and October 18, 1931.

<sup>85</sup> A zoning dispute erupted over the height of the Diplomat at the time of its construction in 1940, when the building inspector stopped construction of the top floor of the building, arguing that the owner violated the zoning code by counting the ground floor as a basement level, thereby creating a nine-story building in an eight-story zone. See "Zoning Dispute Halts 16th Street Apartment Job," *The Washington Post*, May 19, 1940.

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### Avenue of Churches

Beginning in 1815 with the construction of St. John's Episcopal Church at 16th and H Streets, 16th Street emerged as a center for religious edifices. Between H Street and the Maryland line at Eastern Avenue, 16th Street hosts thirty-nine churches and synagogues, representing almost every religious denomination. Between H Street and Florida Avenue there are eight religious buildings, and on Meridian Hill, at its northern apex at Columbia Road, there are three—All Souls Church; National Memorial Baptist Church; and the Washington Chapel of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. All three of these churches were built in the ten-year-period between 1922 and 1932 and corresponded with a rise in church construction along the entire stretch of 16th Street from the White House north to the Montgomery County line. A 1924 Evening Star newspaper article made note of this trend in its headline, "Street of Embassies Now Changing into Great Avenue of Churches."

Church construction on Meridian Hill began in 1920, when Mrs. Henderson approached the Unitarian All Souls Church which she knew was looking to build a new edifice, and offered not only to sell the church the lots upon which to construct its church building, but sweetened the deal by making a financial contribution to the church's construction effort. According to church records, Henderson made the offer "in her wish to maintain an avenue of distinguished architectural quality." Following an architectural competition that included six different architectural firms, of which two were local firms (George Oakley Totten and Wood, Donn & Deming), All Souls Church engaged the services of Henry Shepley from the Boston firm of Coolidge and Shattuck and the grandson of Henry Hobson Richardson. Construction of All Souls began in 1924. Two years earlier, National Baptist Memorial Church had laid its cornerstone just north of All Souls at 16th and Columbia Road on the site of an older church building. Several years later, the Latter Day Saints built its Washington Chapel on a prominent triangular lot at 16th Street and Columbia Road.

### Post World II Changes to Meridian Hill

Due to the presence of foreign legations, churches and luxury apartment buildings, the prestigious character of Meridian Hill managed to survive Mary Henderson's 1931 death and the Great Depression. However, the pre- and post-World War II-era took its toll on the area's residential make-up. The city's wealthy residents and the diplomatic community began a general migration from around Dupont Circle and 16th Street northwesterly to Massachusetts Avenue around Sheridan Circle and to the suburbs. Larger and less luxurious apartment buildings that catered to a less affluent crowd began to be constructed on Meridian Hill. Of particular note was the construction of the 1941-42 Meridian Hill Hotel, a huge 644-room hotel built by the federal government for women brought to the city to fill government jobs. Located on a prominent site immediately north of the park, this enormous building of efficiency apartments diverged from the foreign legations and mansions that were built in the decades preceding it. Indeed the site, formerly owned by Mary Henderson, had been sold in the 1920s to the French government who had intended to build a new embassy on the center of the lot with gardens surrounding it. Rather



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than build its new embassy and proposed chancery buildings, however, the French government opted to leave Meridian Hill entirely and establish themselves instead in Kalorama.

Henderson's Castle, which had remained vacant for several years after Mrs. Henderson's death, was converted in 1937 into a "high-class rooming house" called "Castle H Tennis and Swimming Club."<sup>86</sup> Later, it became an "after hours club" to the distaste of local residents until 1941 when Mr. Eugene Meyer, of the grand White-Meyer residence purchased it. Eight years later in 1949, Meyer had the building demolished, returning the site to the vacant lot that it was before the Henderson's arrival here. Just prior to demolition of the Henderson Castle, though, the former mansion was opened to the public who streamed through the house, ripping out wall paper and tiles and bits of landscaping to take with them as mementos of the past.<sup>87</sup>

Today, the site of Henderson Castle is filled with a 213-townhouse complex (built in 1976) that is bordered on the 16th Street side by the red sandstone wall of the Henderson Castle—a tangible remnant of the first phase of Mrs. Henderson's surviving legacy on Meridian Hill.

Although the end date for the Period of Significance for the historic district is marked by the demolition of Henderson Castle, historical and cultural developments continue the legacy of Meridian Hill. In the 1950s, the park, which had hosted concerts and events since its completion in 1936 became a staging ground for political demonstrations. At a political rally in 1969, activist Angela Davis proposed renaming Meridian Hill Park, "Malcolm X Park." Although the name was never officially adopted by the National Park Service which owns the park, it is commonly known as such today. After decades of neglect, crime and vandalism, the park has been undergoing major renovation and today is well used by all residents and is the scene of community activities and events, the most notable being the Sunday afternoon/evening drum circle that has been a local institution since the 1950s.

#### George Oakley Totten, Jr.

In collaboration with Mary Henderson, George Oakley Totten, Jr. designed more than ten embassy buildings<sup>88</sup> on Meridian Hill, the Meridian Studios apartment building, his own house and the re-constructed Warder house. The design of these buildings provided models for other residences on Meridian Hill, and thus significantly shaped the nature of design on Meridian Hill throughout the first half of the 20th century. George Oakley Totten, Jr. was an accomplished architect whose career extended beyond his association with Mrs. Henderson and who was recognized and respected beyond the city.

<sup>86</sup> See the entry on Henderson Castle in *Sixteenth Street Architecture*, Vol. 1, p. 337-349.

<sup>87</sup> *Sixteenth Street Architecture*, p.340.

<sup>88</sup> In addition to the embassy buildings that were constructed according to his designs, Totten is known to have designed two other foreign legation buildings on Meridian Hill that were never built. One, an Elizabethan-style building was a speculative building planned for the lot upon which the Cubans ultimately built their own embassy. The other, a chancery building for the French government was to have been erected at the northeast corner of 15th and Euclid Streets. See "Resume Building on Embassy Row: Mrs. Henderson Will Erect Chancery for the French Government," *The Evening Star*, 4/9/1927, p. 30.

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Totten (1866-1939) a native of New York and New Jersey received an undergraduate degree from Columbia University, but came to Washington, D.C. to study architecture at The Catholic University of American where he earned his Masters degree in 1892. In 1893, Totten was awarded Columbia University's McKim Traveling Fellowship, enabling him to study at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris from 1893 to 1895. Upon completion of his fellowship, Totten moved to Washington, D.C. where he became chief designer in the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department under Supervising Architect William Martin Aiken. In 1898, he left government service and opened a private practice with his college roommate Laussat R. Rogers. The partnership continued until 1907 when Rogers left the field to become a painter and Totten continued the practice on his own.

Totten's career largely consisted of the design of private residences for Washington's wealthy. After working on a remodeling of Henderson Castle in the early 1900s, Totten soon became Mary Henderson's "official" architect. As such, he was engaged in the design of at least one dozen residential buildings principally located on Meridian Hill or just north and south of it along 16th Street. Totten was the architect of choice for other wealthy Washingtonians and is known to have designed at least as many large dwellings (now embassies) in the Massachusetts Avenue/Sheridan Circle/Kalorama neighborhoods, as well as several outside of this city. Beyond his residential mainstay, Totten designed a few institutional buildings including the University Club, the Congressional Woman's Club, and two now-demolished office buildings in D.C.

Totten's buildings generally show direct influence from his years at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. Totten's buildings are invariably academic revivals of historical styles, most notably French classical styles from the Renaissance, Mannerist and Baroque periods. The interior and exterior detailing of Totten's residential Washington work relies heavily upon applied ornamentation. Totten frequently used the giant, two-story Order of columns and pilasters to articulate facades and treated ground floors with exuberant detail, especially around openings. Totten's richly detailed ornamentation is harshly criticized in *Sixteenth Street Architecture*, which notes: "His buildings depend on this decoration for effect; without it, they are frequently awkward in massing and relationship of elements. In short, they tend to be all surface and no substance."<sup>89</sup>

Totten's interest in historical styles led him to a study of Mayan architecture and the publication of a book, *Maya Architecture*, in 1926. It was also through his interest in Mayan architecture that Totten met his wife, Swedish sculptor Vicken von Post, whom he married in 1921. The two sometimes collaborated on projects such as at Meridian Hill Studios where Mrs. Totten designed and fabricated the ceramic tiles that decorated the over-mantels of the fireplaces in the apartments. Ten years later, in 1932, Mrs. Totten designed eleven marble bas-relief panels illustrating the history of mail transportation to ornament the façade of her husband's new post office building in Waterbury, Connecticut. The Tottens had two sons, George Oakley III and Gilbert von Post.

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<sup>89</sup>*Sixteenth Street Architecture*, Vol. 1, p. 429.

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Totten was a member of the American Institute of Architects and at one time president of the Washington chapter. Over a period of more than 40 years, Totten served in some capacity, either as delegate, secretary, or vice president, to eight International Congresses. He received honorary membership in the Old Russian Society of Architecture and in Architectural societies in Belgium, Austria, and Spain. He died in Washington, D.C. at the age of 72.

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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):** \_\_\_\_\_

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### 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 64.5 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

#### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                        |                       |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 38.928733 | Longitude: -77.037350 |
| 2. Latitude: 38.928674 | Longitude: -77.036197 |
| 3. Latitude: 38.924205 | Longitude: -77.034709 |
| 4. Latitude: 38.918113 | Longitude: -77.035493 |
| 5. Latitude: 38.918114 | Longitude: -77.036500 |
| 6. Latitude: 38.920098 | Longitude: -77.038811 |
| 7. Latitude: 38.923188 | Longitude: -77.038200 |
| 8. Latitude: 38.925869 | Longitude: -77.038630 |

**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: |

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**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of the Meridian Hill Historic District generally extends from V Street on the south to Irving Street on the north and from the east side of 15<sup>th</sup> Street on the east to the west side of 16<sup>th</sup> Street on the west encompassing at its southern end, Meridian Hill Park. Specifically and beginning with a point at the northwest corner of the historic district boundary at the intersection of the south side of Irving Street and the east side of Mount Pleasant Street, the boundary extends east along Irving Street, crosses 16<sup>th</sup> Street, then heads diagonally in a southeast direction along the centerline of 15<sup>th</sup> Street, behind the buildings and lots of those buildings fronting 16<sup>th</sup> Street. The boundary continues down the diagonal 15<sup>th</sup> Street, across Columbia Road, then west along Columbia Road, then heads behind the lot upon which 2901 16<sup>th</sup> Street sits, then crosses Harvard Street and jogs east to follow the centerline of 15<sup>th</sup> Street south past Girard Street, and across Fuller Street. At a point mid-block between Fuller Street and Euclid Street the boundary heads due east at the northern edge of the lot upon which the building at 2633 15<sup>th</sup> Street sits, and extends to the rear alley at the back of the lot. The boundary then continues south along this alley, at the rear of the lots facing 15<sup>th</sup>

Street to the alley located between Clifton and Chapin Street. At this point, the boundary jogs back and forth (east and west) following the rear lot lines of those properties facing 15<sup>th</sup> Street, across from Meridian Hill Park. The boundary continues along these rear lot lines until it intersects with Florida Avenue at New Hampshire Avenue, at which point the boundary then heads southwesterly along New Hampshire Avenue to V Street. At V Street, the boundary heads due west to the west side of 16<sup>th</sup> Street, where it heads north along 16<sup>th</sup> Street, pulling in the Henderson Castle Wall in its entirety. Here, the boundary is drawn narrowly to include only the stone retaining wall located on public property along 16<sup>th</sup> Street, but not intended to include the condominium lots forming the development of Beekman Place, located on the site of the former Henderson Castle on 16<sup>th</sup> Street between Florida Avenue and Belmont Road. At Belmont Road, the boundary jogs west to follow Belmont Road to 17<sup>th</sup> Street, then extends north along the centerline of 17<sup>th</sup> Street to a former alley between Kalorama Road and Crescent Place, NW, excluding the two dwellings at 2303 and 2305 17<sup>th</sup> Street, but including the garage at the rear of the Envoy Apartments and located on its same lot. The boundary line follows the former alley northeasterly to the rear of the lot lines of those properties facing 16<sup>th</sup> Street, then continues north behind these buildings to Euclid Street. At Euclid Street, the boundary jogs east, then due north along the centerline of Mozart Place; the boundary continues north along Mozart Place to Columbia Road, then jogs west to capture the Argonne Apartments at 1629 Columbia Road, then heads northeasterly along the rear lot line of the Argonne to Harvard Street where it heads northwesterly along the centerline of Harvard Street pulling in the triangular parklet (Reservation 309C), then crosses over Harvard Street to the west side lot of the Embassy Apartments at 1613 Harvard Street. The boundary follows the rear lot line of said property east to Mount Pleasant Street, then heads northerly along Mount Pleasant Street to Irving Street and back to the point at the beginning.

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**Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)**

The proposed boundaries include as its visual center Meridian Hill Park and all of those buildings fronting the park along 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Streets. The boundaries also include all of those buildings north of the park, to either side of 16<sup>th</sup> Street, including the large mansions and foreign legations developed by Mary Foote Henderson in her efforts to transform 16<sup>th</sup> Street into a grand avenue of exclusive residences and foreign legations leading to the White House. The boundaries further include a collection of churches at the north end of Meridian Hill, marking Meridian Hill as a northern gateway to the city, and Augustana Luthern Church at the south end of the district, as well as numerous apartment buildings that filled in the lots between the mansions during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The boundaries have been drawn to include the "hill" from the beginning of its ascent at V Street to its culmination at Irving Street, and thus the area historically considered to be Meridian Hill. These boundaries include part of the 1867 plat map "Hall and Elvans Subdivision of Meridian Hill," but not its entirety. The boundaries are based upon historic and architectural developments in the area, as well as present-day visual considerations.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Kim Prothro Williams  
organization: D.C. Historic Preservation Office  
street & number: 1100 4<sup>th</sup> Street, S.W.  
city or town: Washington, D.C. state: DC zip code: 20024  
e-mail: kim.williams@dc.gov  
telephone: (202) 442-8840  
date: April 1, 2014

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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**

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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: Meridian Hill Historic District

City or Vicinity: Washington, D.C.

County:

State: District of Columbia

Photographer: Kim Williams

Date Photographed: Summer 2013/Spring 2014

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

View looking northeast along 16<sup>th</sup> Street from Fuller Street showing the former Spanish Embassy at 2801 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW; the former Embassy of Mexico at 2829 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW; All Soul's Church at 2835 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW; and the National Baptist Memorial Church at 3029 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW

1 of 33

View looking northwest along 16<sup>th</sup> Street the Lithuanian Embassy at 2622 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW; the Cuban Embassy at 2630 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW; and the Polish Embassy at 2640 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW

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View looking northwest along 16<sup>th</sup> Street showing the Cuban Embassy; the Polish Embassy; and the former Italian Embassy at 2700 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW

3 of 33

View looking southwest along 16<sup>th</sup> Street showing the Cuban Embassy; the Lithuanian Embassy at the apartment building at 2620 16<sup>th</sup> Street (non-contributing)

4 of 33

View looking northeast along 15<sup>th</sup> Street from upper terrace of Meridian Hill Park showing 2401 15<sup>th</sup> Street and the apartment building at 2407 15<sup>th</sup> Street, NW

5 of 33

View looking southeast across upper terrace of Meridian Hill Park to 2400 block of 15<sup>th</sup> Street, NW

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View looking westerly at east façade of the former French Embassy at 2460 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
7 of 33

View looking west at roof of former French Embassy at 2460 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
8 of 33

View looking northwest from 16<sup>th</sup> and Euclid Streets looking at south and east elevations of the Venetian Palazzo at 2600 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
9 of 33

View looking west showing east east façade of Lithuaniana Embassy at 2622 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
10 of 33

View looking northwest showing east front and south side elevation of Cuban Embassy at 2630 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
11 of 33

View looking northwest showing east front and south side elevation of the Polish Embassy at 2640 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
12 of 33

View looking northwest showing east front and south side elevation of former Italian Embassy at 2700 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
13 of 33

View looking east showing west façade of the Warder-Totten House at 2633 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
14 of 33

View looking southeast through upper terrace of Meridian Hill Park to 2401 15<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
15 of 33

View looking southwest from upper terrace of Meridian Hill Park to the Envoy Apartments (formerly Meridian Mansions Hotel) at 2400 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
16 of 33

View looking west showing the east elevation of the Park Towers apartments at 2440 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
17 of 33

View looking northwest from the upper terrace of Meridian Hill Park showing the east elevation of the Dorchester Apartments at 2480 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
18 of 33

View looking east at the west elevation of Park Square Apartments at 2407 15<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
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View looking southeast at the west elevation of the Park Towers Apartments at 2325 15<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
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View looking northeast showing the west elevation of the Meridian Hill Studios Apartments at 2633 15<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
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View looking southwest from 16<sup>th</sup> Street and Columbia Road showing All Soul's Church in the foreground and the former Embassy of Mexico in the background  
22 of 33

View looking southeast from 16<sup>th</sup> Street north of Columbia Road showing National Metropolitan Baptist Church  
23 of 33

View looking south showing north elevation of the Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints at 2810 16<sup>th</sup> Street NW  
24 of 33

View looking southeast towards the Meridian Hill Park wall along east side of 16<sup>th</sup> Street  
25 of 33

View looking north from water basin at lower end of Meridian Hill Park showing cascading fountain  
26 of 33

View looking east showing niche in Meridian Hill Park wall on east side of 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
27 of 33

View looking north from lower terrace of Meridian Hill Park looking up path to upper esplanade on west side of park  
28 of 33

View looking northwest from 15<sup>th</sup> Street at entrance into the park at the lower esplanade on east side of park  
29 of 33

View looking northeast showing south and west elevations of Augustana Lutheran Church at 1511 V Street, NW  
30 of 33

View looking northwest showing Henderson Castle wall on west side of 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, just north of Florida Avenue, NW  
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View looking northeast showing non-contributing houses in 2300 block of 15<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
32 of 33

View looking northeast showing non-contributing apartments in 2300 block of 15<sup>th</sup> Street,  
NW  
33 of 33

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

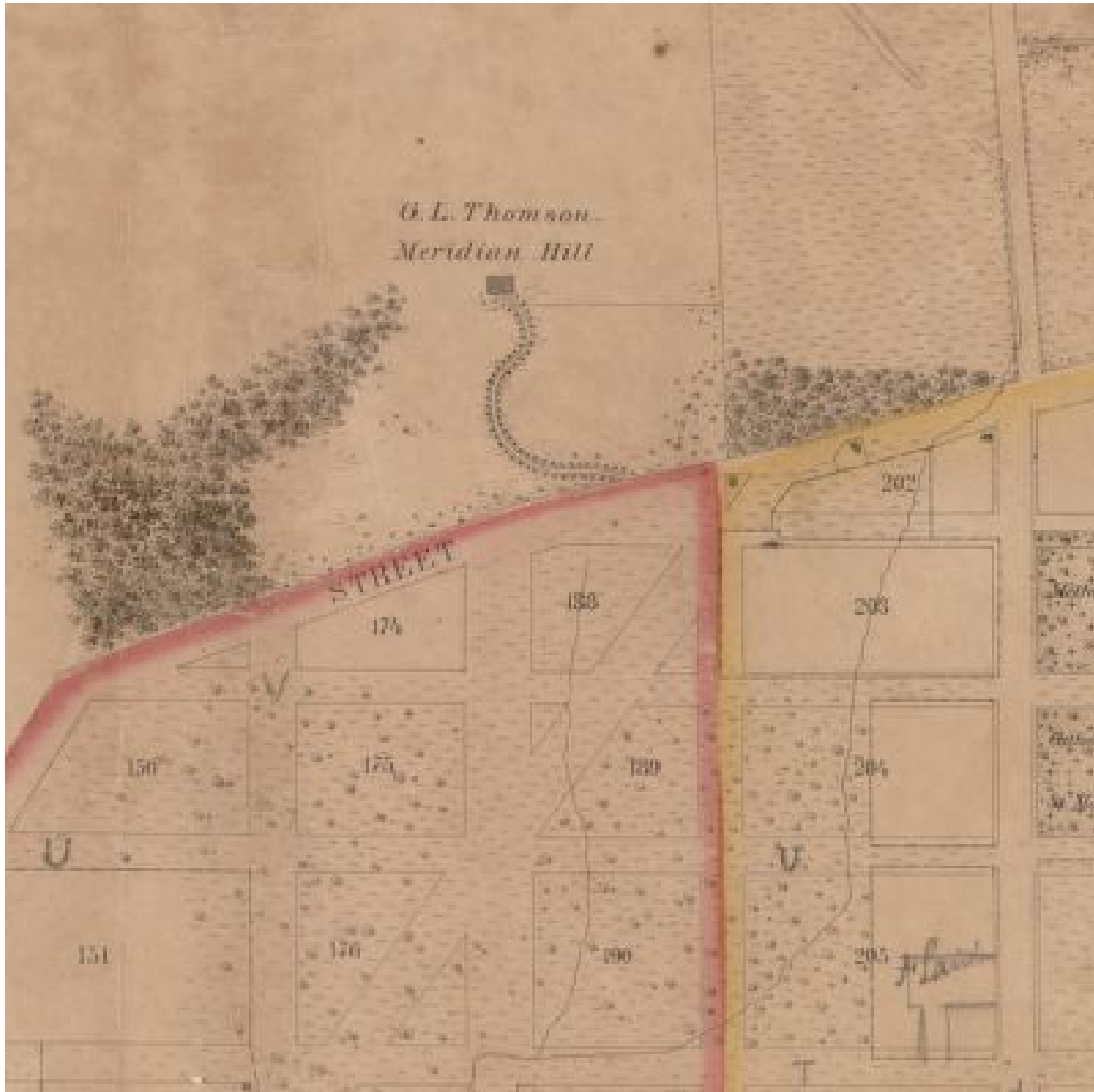
**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**  
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**Detail of *Map of Washington City*, A. Boschke, 1857 showing Meridian Hill estate**

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National Park Service

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*Life in Camp Cameron at Meridian Hill, May 1861 (Matthew Brady, photographer, Library of Congress)*

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Plat of Hall & Elvans Subdivision of Meridian Hill, 1867. (Subdivision Plat Book LC2/58A,B)

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***Houses on 15<sup>th</sup> Street (Columbia Avenue on plat) in the Meridian Hill Subdivision prior to demolition in 1915. The MacVeagh House (later Embassy of Mexico), built 1910, is visible at the center of photo rising above and behind the still extant frame houses. (Courtesy of Historical Society of Washington CHS 5203)***

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***Henderson Castle at the northwest corner of 16<sup>th</sup> Street and Florida Avenue, NW***  
(Courtesy of the Historical Society of Washington)

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***View Looking north on Sixteenth Street from east side of street south of Euclid Street at site of Meridian Hill Park, circa 1906, and showing the Venetian (Pink) Palace (1905) in center and the Kenesaw Apartments (1905) at center background. (Courtesy Historical Society of Washington CHS 08001)***

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**View looking northwest on Sixteenth Street from Meridian Hill Park, ca. 1925. The old French Embassy (1907) is at left-center of frame. The Venetian Palace and the embassies of Cuba, Poland and Italy in the foreground behind the French Embassy. The Warder House Apartments (moved from lower Sixteenth Street to the Totten House site) is at far right of frame at the head of the park. The spire of All Souls Church rises behind the Warder-Totten House. (Courtesy Library of Congress)**



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***Circa 1910 view of the 2600 block of Sixteenth Street, including the Venetian (Pink) Palace at 2600, the duplex at 2620-2622, and the then-future Embassy of Poland at 2640. The Embassy of Cuba at 2630 Sixteenth Street (1916) had not yet been constructed. (Courtesy of D.C. Public Library)***

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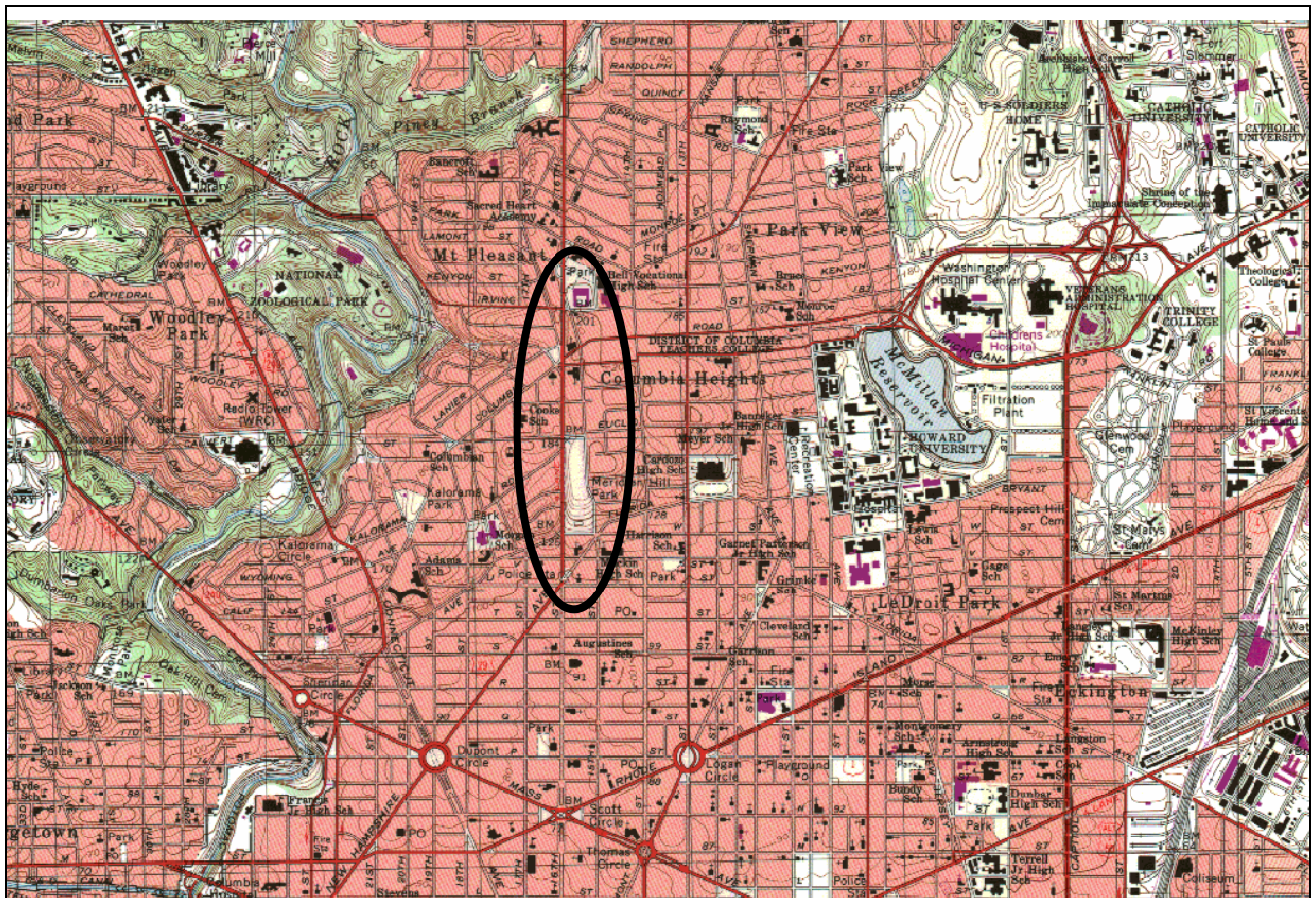
***View of 2401, 2437 and 2535 15<sup>th</sup> Street looking northeast from upper esplanade of Meridian Hill Park, ca 1925. (Courtesy of the Historical Society of Washington CHS 07677)***

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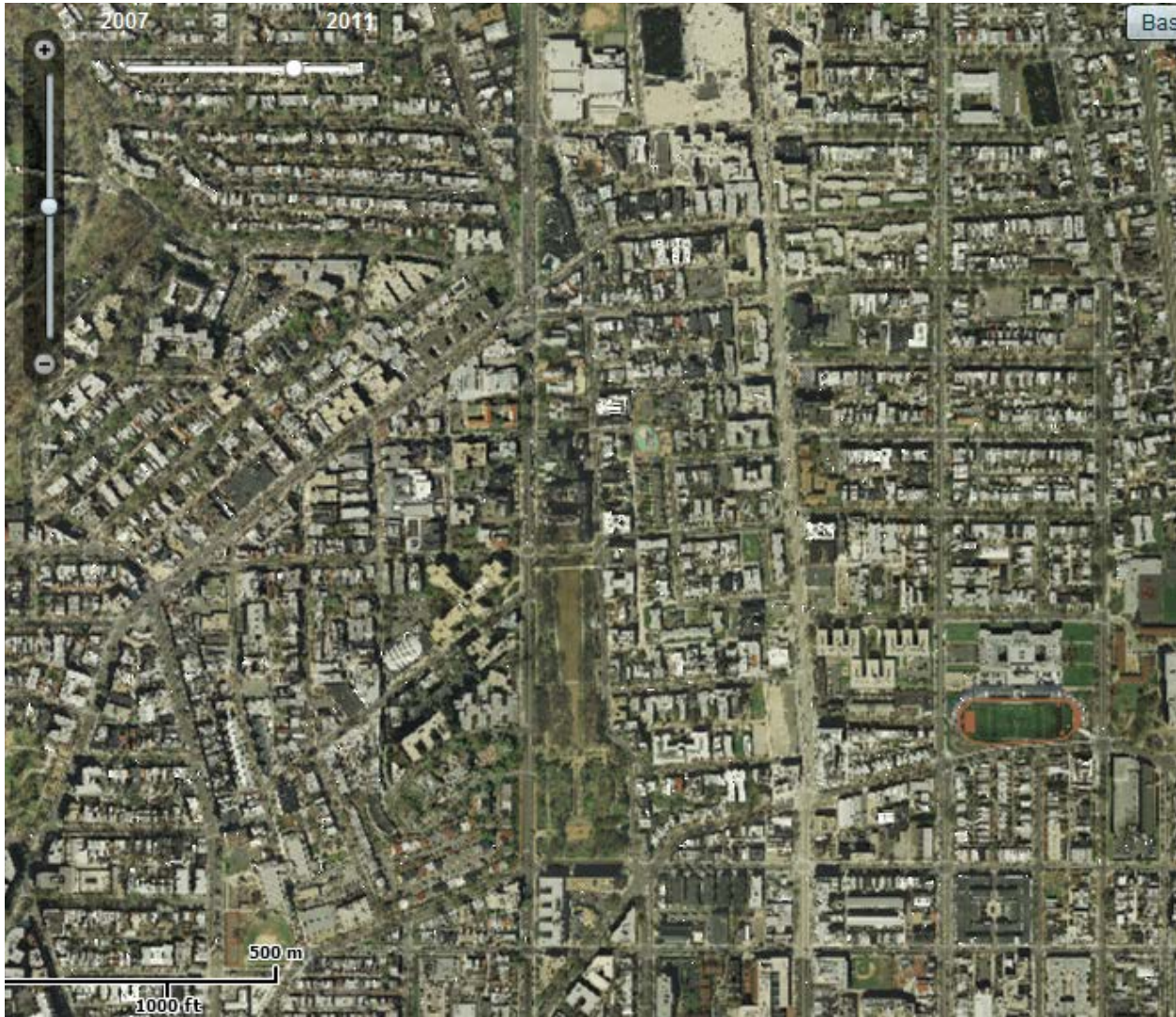
USGS Washington West Quad Map showing general area of Meridian Hill Historic District (see Boundary Map for boundaries)

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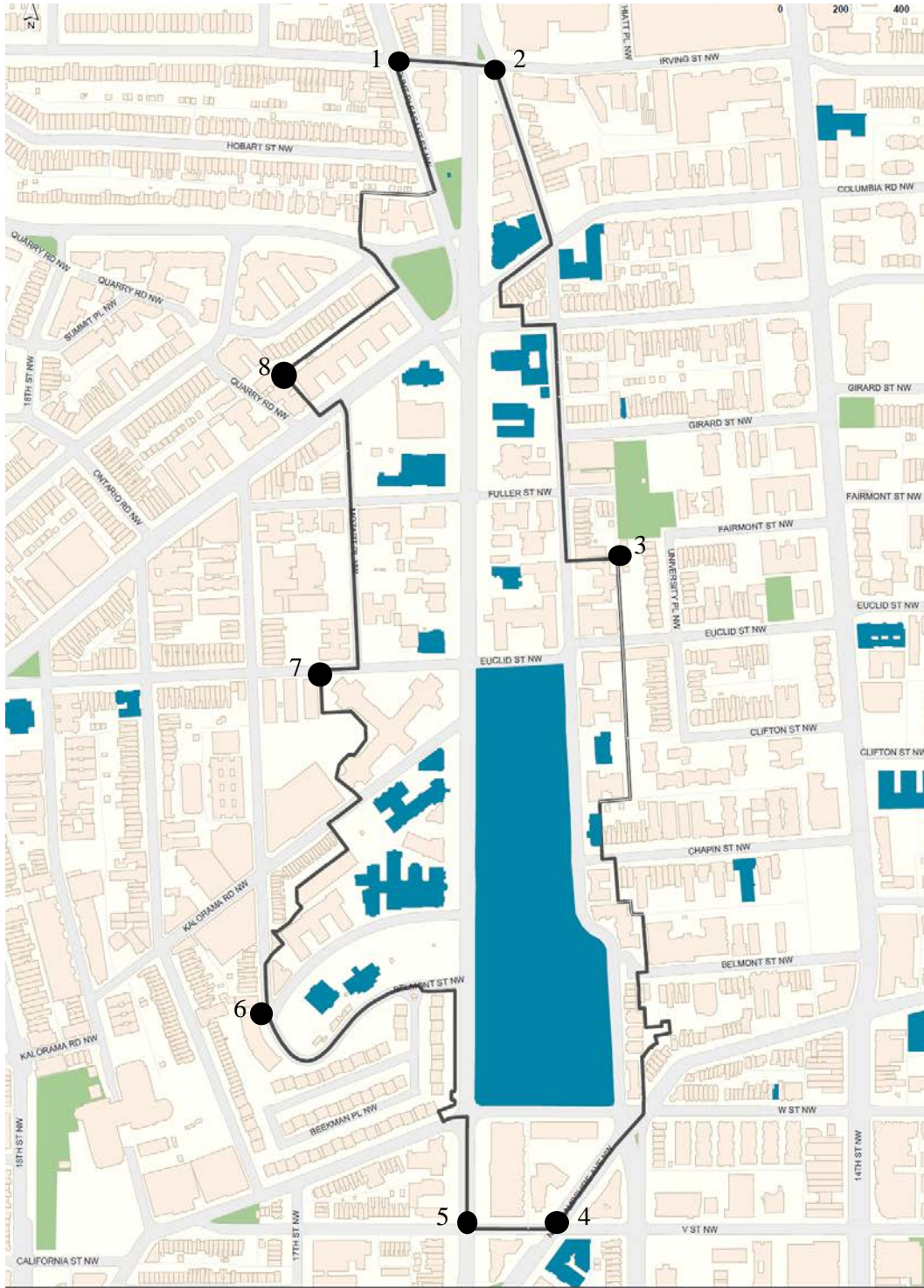
Aerial photograph showing Meridian Hill Historic District  
(DC GIS, District of Columbia, Office of Planning, Aerial Photo, 2010)

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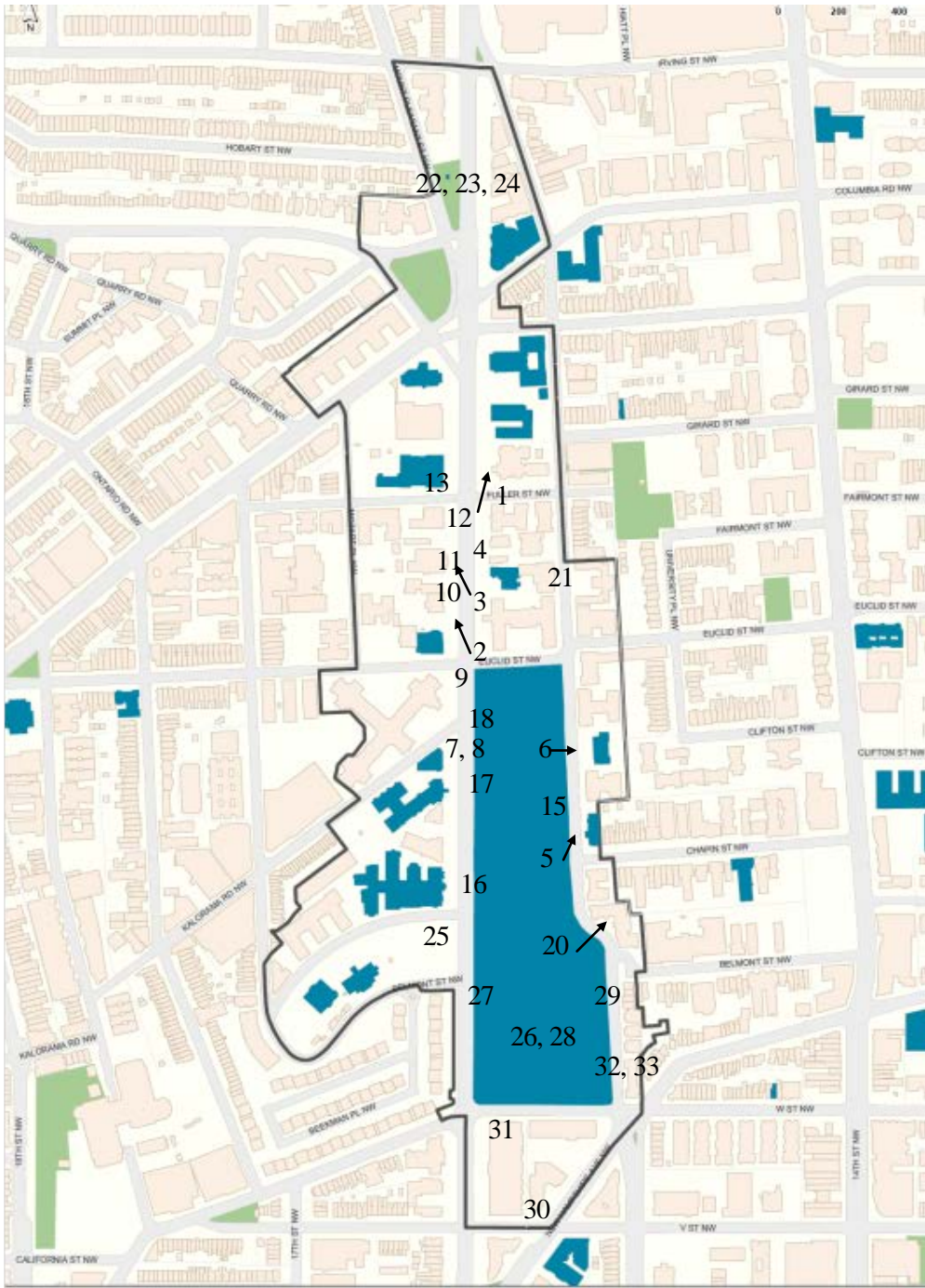
Meridian Hill Historic District Boundary Map (Colored buildings are D.C. Landmarks) Showing Latitude and Longitude Points (DC GIS, District of Columbia, Office of Planning, 2014)

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Meridian Hill Historic District Key to Photographs



30





2620

MONARC







15  
M.P.H.

NO LEFT TURN  
ON RED LIGHT



2401

NO 3RD CENTURY BUILDING  
AND MEDICAL











INTER-AMERICAN  
SERVICES BUILDING

DO NOT  
ENTER

51



CONSTRUCTION

2622









POTOMAC  
CONSTRUCTION GROUP

(202) 525-2706

FULLER ST  
1600

POTOMAC









PARK  
TOWER















Mount Pleasant  
is a Village

Upperfield



16<sup>TH</sup> ST.  
COLUMBIA RD.



Rock Creek  
Park Wa  
Information  
Información  
US Park Poli  
US Estacion  
a Policia  
Park Close  
El Parque C









MERIDIAN HILL

NO PARKING  
EXCEPT FOR  
EMERGENCY  
VEHICLES  
ONLY





Visitors Must Be On Leash  
Clean Up After Pets









UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Meridian Hill Historic District

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, District of Columbia

DATE RECEIVED: 4/04/14 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 4/25/14  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 5/12/14 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 5/21/14  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 14000211

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: Y SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT  RETURN  REJECT 5/21/2014 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept

REVIEWER Patrick Andrews DISCIPLINE 5/21/2014

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER



**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Patrick Andrus, National Register of Historic Places

**FROM:** Kim Williams, D.C. Historic Preservation Office

**DATE:** April 2, 2014

**RE:** Meridian Hill Historic District Nomination

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Kim Williams".

Please find enclosed the following:

- The enclosed disk (Disk 1 of 3) contains the true and correct copy of the nomination for the Meridian Hill Historic District Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places
- The enclosed Disks 2 and 3 of 3 contain digital photographs of the Meridian Hill Historic District Nomination
- Original Cover Sheet signed by David Maloney, D.C. Historic Preservation Officer