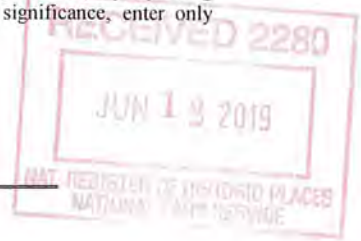


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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: Equitable Life Insurance Building (1956-1975)

Other names/site number: Fannie Mae Headquarters (1975-2016)

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: 3900 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.

City or town: Washington State: D.C. County: 001

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

 X A B X C D

<u>DAVID MALONEY / DC SHPO</u>		<u>6/11/2019</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 <u> </u> meets <u> </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.	

Signature of commenting official:	Date

Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

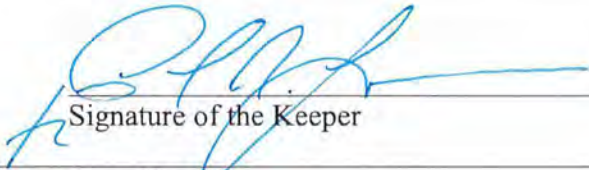
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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

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


Signature of the Keeper

7/29/2019
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>1</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/business

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/business

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY REVIVALS/Colonial Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: BRICK

Walls: BRICK

Roof: STONE/Slate

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.)

Summary Paragraph

The building at 3900 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W. was originally built in 1956-1958 as the headquarters of the Equitable Life Insurance Company of Washington, D.C.¹ From 1975 through 2016 it served as the home of the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae). The building, consisting of a five-part plan building with a main block with hyphens (1956-1958) and two end wings (1963), dominates its site with a broad lawn in front between the building and Wisconsin Avenue. A rear (west) addition built in 1978 that connected to both the central block and the wings by hyphens was demolished in 2019, as was a large structured parking garage west of this addition.

¹ Equitable Life Insurance Company of Washington, D.C. is not to be confused with other companies operating under the name Equitable Life Insurance in other parts of the country, which are separate entities. Throughout this document, the company under discussion is the Equitable Life Insurance Company of Washington, D.C. only.

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The main block and end wings were designed by local architect Leon Chatelain, Jr. in a Georgian Revival style. The building was modelled on the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg, Virginia (originally built in 1781, reconstructed 1931-1934)—a clear reference to the origins of the United States that served to emphasize the longevity of the insurance industry. The main block and wings are characterized by their brickwork, hipped slate roof, dormer windows, and decorative brickwork and wood trimming. The original design incorporated a landscaped courtyard and a parking area immediately to the rear of the building. In 1978 when the rear addition was built, the area between the main building and addition was redesigned with formal landscaped courtyards between the buildings. The 1978 rear addition and these formal courtyards were removed in recent months, exposing the west elevation of the center block and end wings that had been partially obscured by the 1978 addition. The site is currently being excavated and prepared for new construction. The historic building will be renovated and the west elevation will be returned to its historic condition.

Other than the rear (west) addition that has been removed, the Equitable Insurance Company building has seen only minor changes on the exterior (window replacements that matched the historic ones). The interior of the building, however, has undergone extensive renovations, leaving little historic interior fabric intact.

The building is located in Square 1823 on Lot 801. The National Register boundaries include 5.25 acres of this 10-acre lot. The 5.25 acres encompass the 1958-63 building, the gracious front and side yards, and the site of the 1978 rear addition. A stand-alone brick garage structure, built in 1978, and demolished in 2019 is not included within the National Register boundaries.

Narrative Description

Exterior

The Equitable Life Insurance Building at 3900 Wisconsin Ave is a building of three stories plus a basement level presented in the Colonial Revival style, based on Georgian aesthetic precepts. It consists of three sections: a central block, connecting hyphens and two end wings. The central block, connecting hyphens and end wings are consistent with Georgian-style five-part massing. Constructed of steel framing with concrete slabs, the building is clad with red brick laid in a Flemish bond pattern featuring glazed headers, rubbed and gauged brick window lintels and corner quoins. The hipped roofs are sheathed with slate shingles.² Soffits exhibit wood moldings with dentil work. The fenestration of the main façade follows a typical symmetric organization. Windows throughout the building are replacements but match the historic configuration.

A two-story plus raised basement addition, built across the rear (west) side of the property in 1978, has been recently removed. This wing was connected to the center pavilion of the original building and to the north and south end wings through narrow, enclosed brick hyphens coming off single bays of the west walls of each of those wings. The 1978 addition thus enclosed the

² The original building permit has not been located; however, photographs of the building under construction indicate that the building is steel-framed with concrete floor slabs.

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garden areas between the center and end pavilions, creating open landscaped court areas. The rear addition largely left the west elevation of the original building intact, but obscured it from view. Today, this rear addition has been removed, re-exposing the west elevation. A structured brick garage serving the building was located west of the rear addition outside the National Register boundaries. This stand-alone garage had two partially below grade levels and roof deck surface parking on-level with the first story of the rear addition.

Central Block and Connectors (1958)

The main elevation faces east and fronts Wisconsin Avenue. The central block is five bays wide. The main entrances to the building are located in the three center bays at the level of the first floor. The entrances are reached by a set of eight stone stairs with four metal railings. Each of the three bays has an arched doorway in a brick surround. The double replacement doors are primarily glass and single-light, a departure from the overall Colonial Revival design. They are topped by arched transoms. Above the entrances at the second-floor level is a wood balcony with turned posts.

Window openings on the first and second floors are rectangular and presented in an organized fashion. They have brick surrounds of a redder brick than the primary cladding, which matches four courses of brick that visually separate the first and second floors. The openings are fitted with molded vinyl windows that are typically flat-headed, featuring nine-over-twelve lights on the first floor and nine-over-nine lights on the second. On the third floor, window openings are set in hipped dormers that straddle the bays. The dormer window openings are also rectangular, but are of a smaller size than those of the lower stories. The windows are also of vinyl and feature six-over-nine-lights. Where they exist, window openings at the basement level open onto an areaway and are of the same form and size as those on the first and second stories. The basement windows are also vinyl and feature nine-over-nine lights, but do not have brick surrounds.

At the crest of the roof is a wood railing with turned posts and ball finials. Set in the center of the roof is a two-story wood and glass cupola topped by a weathervane. The cupola and railing are surrounded by four red brick chimneys, two to the south and two to the north. On the north and south elevations, which face onto the interior courtyards, the central hall has nine bays. The bay furthest to the east consists of one six-panel double door with a ten-light transom at the first floor and typical windows at the second and third floor. The remainder of the elevations have eight typical windows on the first floor, four elongated twenty-over-twenty light windows with arched headers on the second floor, which originally opened into the building's assembly room, dining room, and kitchen, and four hipped dormer windows on the third floor. The west elevation is dominated by the hyphen connecting to the 1978 addition.

The connectors to the north and south of the central block are each twelve bays on the east and west elevations. The west elevations face onto the interior courtyards. On the east elevation only, they have typical windows and window openings at the basement level, which are located behind a brick retaining wall. The connectors exhibit typical fenestration on the first and second

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floors. Each connector has six hipped dormer windows. There are no north or south elevations for the connectors as they meet the central hall and side wings.

End Wings (1963)

At the north and south ends of the building are the two brick wings. Each wing is largely rectangular but with a short, cross axes giving them a cruciform plan. The longer arm runs east-west and the shorter cross-axis runs north-south, intersecting the hyphens. On the east elevations, the wings are each five bays wide with single windows arranged symmetrically and three dormer windows in the front slope of the intersecting hipped roof. The cross-axis projection on the outside walls of each end wing accommodates secondary entrances on the south and north elevations. The wings are constructed of brick laid in Flemish bond with glazed headers that match the original 1956-1958 construction.

On the north and south elevations in the longer arm of the cross there are ten bays to the west and five bays to the east. They have typical windows and window openings at the basement, first floor, and second floor. There are additionally four dormers above the ten bays to the west and two dormers above the five bays to the east. The east portion of the south elevation of the north wing has a brick stair leading from grade to the basement level. The south elevation of the south wing and the north elevation of the north wing each have an additional four bays in the shorter arm of the cross that accommodate side entrances. The first and fourth bays of this section display typical fenestration, while the two center bays vary by wing. On the south elevation, the entrance at the first floor is raised above grade and is reached by a set of stone stairs. The stair has metal side railings and a top landing. Centered on this elevation is an arched and vaulted entryway with raised wood paneling, and a double replacement door recessed into the vaulted opening. Rubbed bricks frame the arched entryway. Above the door opening at the second story is a wooden balcony with turned posts.

On the north elevation, the entrance at the first floor is also reached by a set of stone stairs with metal hand railings. The double glass replacement doors are recessed behind an engaged brick surround with a segmentally arched pediment, pilasters and consoles of rubbed and gauged brick. A wooden balcony with an ornate iron railing surmounts this door at the second story level.

1978 Addition

The two-story brick addition, built across the rear (west) side of the property in 1978, was designed in a Modern contextualist manner considered at the time to be in keeping with and yet distinct from the original building. It was connected to the main building by one-story brick hyphens at the center pavilion and end wings, leaving the remainder of the rear elevation of the original building untouched. Open landscaped courts were located between the original building and the addition. A curved vestibule on the addition's west elevation provided access from the west exterior to the interior via a large, segmental arched opening. A balcony was located atop this vestibule with a brick parapet wall on either side of a central wrought iron railing.

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2018 view of the east elevation of the 1978 addition looking north. The brick hyphen (background) connected the addition to the original building's central pavilion

In recent months, this rear addition was removed, fully exposing the west elevation of the building. Openings in the brickwork are located at the points where hyphens connected the 1978 addition to the main building. This brickwork will be replaced and windows built out to match the existing.



2019 view looking easterly showing west elevation of original building with 1978 addition removed

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Interior

The interior of the building was completely destroyed by fire in 1968³ and was remodeled in 1978 when Fannie Mae moved into the building. The interior spaces are largely defined by a reception area, circulation corridors, and open work spaces with cubicles. Dropped ceilings, furred out gypsum board walls, and wall-to-wall carpeting enclose the separate areas, leaving no interior historic fabric either intact or visible. The windows of the front exterior walls open into individual offices, while those on the rear exterior wall open into the cubicle-filled work space.

The front doors at the center of the building provide the primary and direct access to the interior. These three arched doors open into a shallow vestibule which itself opens through three more fully glazed arched doors into a larger central reception area. This reception area has a curved back wall with an opening on-center leading to a passage that opens into the elevator bank. The reception features paneled wood wainscoting, a wood entablature surrounding the opening to the elevator area, wood crown molding, baseboard molding, and tan terrazzo floors. The terrazzo floors may survive from the original period of construction, but all other interior detailing is outside the period of significance.

A pair of full-glass doors leads through the opening from the reception area, past a cloak room and electrical closet to the central elevator bank. The elevator doors are brushed bronze-colored steel. Across from the elevators is the building's central enclosed stairwell. This elevator/stair bank area is lit by recessed lighting and features end-grain, wood-block flooring. This flooring is also found in the 1978 wing, indicating that the floors date to that period of construction. On the second and third floors, the elevator lobbies are carpeted and the wall opposite the elevator doors is covered in fabric paneling.

A corridor leads north and south from the elevator lobby running the length of the interior of the rear wall of the central wing. This corridor, lit by the windows of the exterior wall and open to the rear courtyards, provides access to the large, open-plan office filled with cubicles. Private offices fill the front (east) part of this area, each one having the benefit of a window and a view to the front of the building.

The corridor extends from the central wing, around the inside walls of the 1963 north and south wings. These wings are arranged similarly to the central wing: cubicles fill the area off the open corridor running along the inside wall of the wing. The open cubicle area is lit by shared and natural light from the exterior windows, while the private offices in the outside part of the wings are each lit by its own window. Sections of the circulation corridor areas are separated by fire doors of beige-painted metal in matching surrounds.

On the first floor to the west of the elevator lobby, within the rear part of the central pavilion of the building, is a large, open-plan lounge area. This area has light wood plank flooring and is lit by contemporary light fixtures.

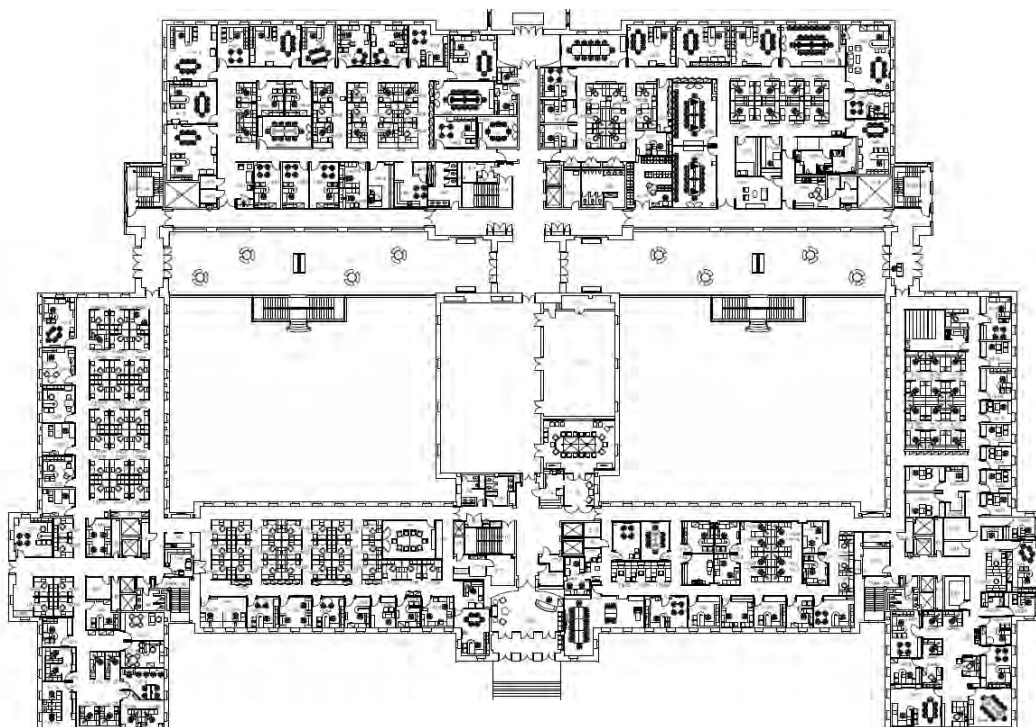
³ *Evening Star*, "Damage is Put at \$100,000," January 13, 1966: B1.

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At the rear (west) end wall of the lounge area a door opened into a passage/hyphen that connected the original building to the 1978 rear addition. Large, segmentally arched openings on the north and south sides of the hyphen connector open via paired and glazed doors to an exterior terrace that spans the length of the building. The terraces look over the courtyards below and provide access to them via double-flight exterior stairs.

The 1978 rear wing was filled with open cubicle areas in the center of the wing and private offices or work areas ranging around the exterior walls. At the center of the west end wall of the wing, slightly off-axis from the central entrance to the building, a door on the first floor led out to brick steps and terracing that included an open brick walkway to the parking garage. At the second floor, doors opened onto a curved balcony.



Interior Plan, First Floor

Site

The site boasts an extensive front lawn. The lawn is separated from the sidewalk by a low brick wall with two openings, each flanked by two stone urns on brick pedestals. The main entrance is reached by a circular drive paved in Belgian block, a feature that dates to the time of the building's construction. The west side of the drive is lined by hedges. To the east of the drive across from the front entrance is a small fountain set on flagstone, which is bordered to the south, east, and north by a hedge trimmed in a box form. The hedge is flanked by two banks of small trees.

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Around the time the end wings were constructed in 1963, the north and south lawns were altered to provide access to the building's new north and south entrances. At the south lawn, a concrete walkway extended to the west from the south entrance stoop. At the north lawn, an irregularly-shaped circular drive and brick walkway extended from the north access drive to the stoop of the north entrance. Both of these features had been removed from the property by 1977.⁴ Today, large trees are found to the south and north of the building.

To the rear of the original building two landscaped courtyards were designed for the two U-shaped areas that were formed by the intersection of the central pavilion and connector wings, and the connector wings and end wings. These landscaped courts were framed on the west side by a retaining wall, beyond which was the 1978 addition. These courts, their plantings and hardscape features have been removed.

INTEGRITY

The Equitable Life Insurance Company, despite its current state of renovation, retains a high degree of integrity. It is located on its original site, set back from Wisconsin Avenue, in its historic setting. The principal elevations of the Georgian Revival-style building remain fully intact, displaying their high-quality materials, design and craftsmanship. The substantial addition from 1978 has been removed and the original exterior west wall is being restored

⁴ John Carl Warnecke, FAIA, Joseph R. Loring & Assoc., Martin & Cagley, Edaw Inc., *Federal National Mortgage Association* (Phase III) (October 1977).

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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.)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1958-1963

Significant Dates

1958

1963

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Leon Chatelain, Jr.

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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.)

The Equitable Life Insurance Company of Washington, D.C. was one of the oldest life insurance and mortgage corporations in the District when it engaged Washington architect Leon Chatelain, Jr., to design a new headquarters for their growing company. The building that he designed, which was constructed between 1956 and 1958, is a 20th Century representation of the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg, Virginia, a design choice that both symbolized American heritage and established a direct visual association for the company with American roots. In 1963, Equitable Life constructed two additional wings, also designed by Chatelain, one on each side of the original building. Equitable Life sold the property to the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) in 1975. Fannie Mae constructed a large rear addition in 1978 and occupied the building from 1979 until 2016. The property was sold in November 2016 to NASH – Roadside 3900 Wisconsin, LLC.

The Equitable Life Insurance Building is significant under National Register Criteria A and C at the local level of significance with Architecture and Commerce as the Areas of Significance. Under Criterion A, it is significant for its association with the massive expansion of the nation's insurance and mortgage business that took place during the mid-twentieth century. The population increase and stable economy following World War II brought with it commercial and organizational growth. The Equitable Life Insurance Company of D.C., like its competitors, sought to establish itself as a sound and prosperous business whose mission was to provide security for the future through mortgages and life insurance. Although neither business was new to the United States, the expansion that occurred mid-century is testimony to the sense of stable government and economy that defines the era.

Under Criterion C, the Equitable Life Insurance Building is significant because it exhibits a high artistic expression of the Georgian Revival Style. It was designed by architect Leon Chatelain, Jr. during an era of widespread enthusiasm for an idealized Colonial past when popular aesthetics prized the incorporation of historic design into contemporary structures. It is also one of many buildings that brought the enthusiasm for Colonial Revival to its logical conclusion by replicating the design of prominent buildings of the Colonial period; in this case, the Governor's Mansion in Williamsburg, Virginia. The large size of the building required an exaggeration of the prototype, while the modern use imposed the employment of modern construction methods and materials. This use of historic American architectural design represents the end of an era as new styles, forms, and materials associated with Modernism largely overtook the traditionalist aesthetic that had dominated American architecture during the 20th century.

The Period of Significance for the property extends from 1958 when the central pavilion and wings were completed to 1963 when the end wings were constructed.

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

Equitable Life and the Expansion of the Insurance Industry

Insurance has been offered in the United States since 1735, when the first insurance company, the Friendly Society, was established in Charleston, South Carolina. In 1752, Benjamin Franklin was one of the founders of a mutual insurance company, the Philadelphia Contributorship, which is still in operation. The first life insurance company, the Presbyterian Ministers' Fund, was established in 1759. Nonetheless, life insurance was not popular through the 1700s and the early 1800s, as it was viewed as a form of gambling. The popularity of insurance began to increase during the mid-1800s and mutual insurers began to proliferate, offering ownership benefits in a mutual company.⁵ The Equitable Life Insurance Company of Washington, D.C. was founded in 1885 by Allen C. Clark, who became the company's first secretary.⁶ In 1902, it was incorporated as a legal reserve company.⁷ Both Equitable Life and the insurance industry in general continued to grow through the 1920s alongside widespread growth in personal income.⁸

In comparison to most industries, insurance—particularly life insurance—was relatively unscathed by the Great Depression. Despite low interest rates and mortgage defaults, only 20 out of 250 life insurance companies went into receivership during the Great Depression.⁹ Moreover, the Great Depression solidified life insurance's reputation as a worthwhile investment. As the *Washington Post* reported, between 1930 and 1935, life insurance companies paid out more than \$16 billion, which significantly alleviated some of the economic distress of the Great Depression.¹⁰ As one of the companies that did not go into receivership, Equitable Life enjoyed consistent success and progress through the 1930s, and in 1934, the company opened a second office in Cleveland.¹¹

Following World War II, the insurance industry entered an age of significant profit and expansion. Between 1945 and 1950, investment of life insurance funds in housing mortgages rose over \$4.5 billion. Life insurance companies held additional large investments in farm mortgages and in industrial and commercial properties for a near \$12.7 billion in investments in July 1950.¹² This figure was more than double the assets of the industry ten years earlier. Equitable Life was even more successful than the insurance industry as a whole: between 1940 and 1950, Equitable Life tripled its assets and, by October 1950, had thirty-two branch offices in

⁵ Jeremy Hallett, "Life Insurance: An Old Product for a New Time," <https://www.quotacy.com/history-of-life-insurance/> (accessed December 5, 2016).

⁶ *Washington Post*, "Allen C. Clark, Equitable Life Founder, Dead," May 17, 1943: 10.

⁷ *Washington Post*, "Equitable Life is Forced to Expand Offices," November 16, 1934: 28.

⁸ Hallett.

⁹ Hallett.

¹⁰ *Washington Post*, "Life Insurance Called Cushion for Depression," December 6, 1935: 22.

¹¹ *Washington Post*, "Equitable Life is Forced to Expand Offices," November 16, 1934: 28.

¹² *Washington Post*, "Insurance Aids Home Buying," July 30, 1950: R6.

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six states and the District of Columbia.¹³ The *Washington Post* reported that, in 1955, life insurance companies paid out over \$5 billion in claims, with more than half of that amount paid to living policyholders as annuities or pensions. By 1956, more than 100 million Americans had life insurance policies.¹⁴ Equitable Life was among the beneficiaries of the uptick in life insurance and, in 1953, reported 360 million dollars in insurance in force and over \$8.5 billion in capital and reserves. In 1954, the company announced a 10-for-1 stock split.¹⁵ In 1956 and 1958, the company twice set new records for itself in insurance in force, sales, gross income, and assets. Additionally, in 1958, Equitable Life held over \$60 million in mortgage loans, with more than \$58 million in the District of Columbia metropolitan area.¹⁶

Equitable Life was not the only Washington insurance operation to experience success during the 1950s, nor the only company where that success manifested as an impressive new headquarters building. Equitable Life's new headquarters was one of three new insurance company headquarters under construction in the D.C. metropolitan area as of 1958. The Government Employees Insurance Co. (GEICO), which had its headquarters at Vermont Avenue and K Street, N.W., constructed its new Modernist headquarters at Western and Willard Avenues in Chevy Chase, Montgomery County.¹⁷ The 276,500 square-foot building, completed in 1959, was designed by Philadelphia architect Vincent G. Kling and cost \$8 million to build. People's Life Insurance also relocated from 1343 H Street, N.W. to a new Stripped Classicist headquarters at New Hampshire Avenue between F and G Streets in Foggy Bottom. Costing \$3 million, the building was designed by prominent local architectural firm Mills, Petticord & Mills and was finished in 1958. At \$2,250,000, Equitable Life's Colonial Revival building was the least expensive of the three. As a group, the three headquarters represented three of the most popular architectural styles of the day.¹⁸

¹³ *Washington Post*, "Equitable Life of D.C. to Vote Hike in Capital," October 26, 1950: B9.

¹⁴ *Washington Post*, "Insurance for Life," September 25, 1956: 12.

¹⁵ *Washington Post*, "Equitable Life of D.C. Plans 10-for-1 Split," October 14, 1954: 29.

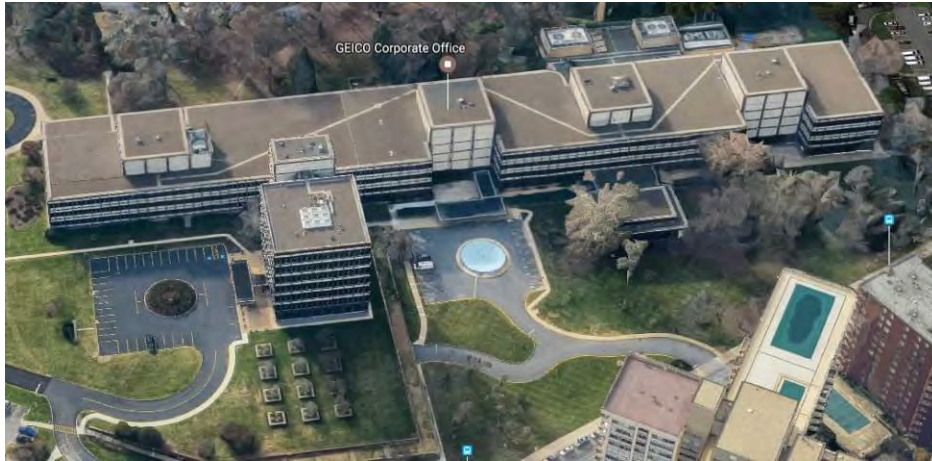
¹⁶ *Washington Post*, "New Records Set by Equitable Life," March 20, 1957: A23; *Washington Post*, "More Records Set by Equitable Life," March 20, 1958: B14. Though an expansion in the insurance industry occurred nationwide, Equitable Life's operations were concentrated in the Washington, D.C. area and this report limits itself to that scope.

¹⁷ GEICO offered only automobile insurance during this period; however, automobile insurance also enjoyed a significant uptick during the 1950s, in part because of new policy requirements (*Washington Post*, "New DC Law Increases Auto Insurance Sales," January 4, 1956: 46).

¹⁸ *Evening Star*, "3 DC Insurance Firms Plan New Buildings," June 10, 1958: A16.

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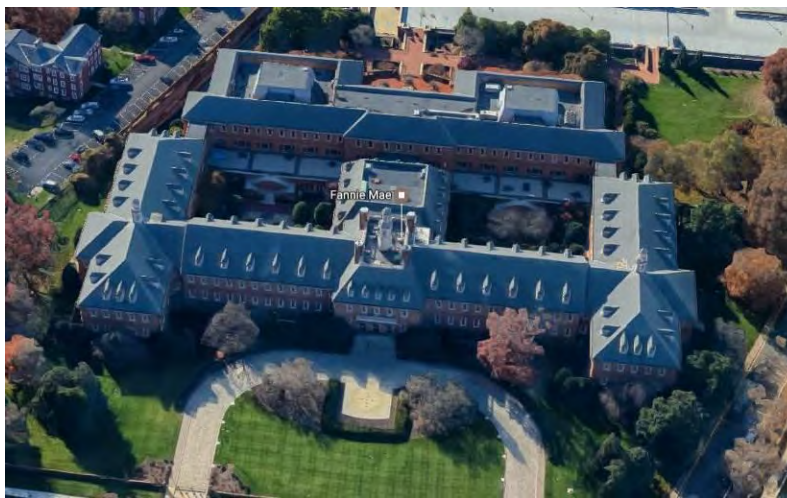
GEICO Headquarters at 5360 Western Ave., Chevy Chase, MD. Photo from Google Maps, 2016.



Former People's Life Insurance Headquarters at 601 New Hampshire Ave., N.W. Currently in use as the Embassy of Saudi Arabia. Photo from Google Maps, 2016

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*Former Equitable Life Insurance Headquarters at 3900 Wisconsin Ave., N.W. Currently Fannie Mae Headquarters.
Photo from Google Maps, 2016.*

Although Equitable Life Insurance is the only insurance company known to have constructed a Colonial or Georgian Revival headquarters in Washington, insurance companies in other locales also adopted the style. For example, in Richmond, Virginia, both the Home Beneficial Life Insurance Company and the Lawyers Title Insurance Company constructed new Georgian Revival headquarters in the late 1940s to 1950s. Like Equitable Life, the Home Beneficial Life Insurance Company also reported rapid growth during this period, increasing assets by more than seven million dollars in the 1950 alone.¹⁹ Home Beneficial Life Insurance applied for a permit to construct their new headquarters at 3901 Broad Street in Richmond in September of 1949; the building was projected to cost about \$1.3 million.²⁰ The Lawyers Title Insurance Company, which also enjoyed success during this period, followed in 1958 with the construction of their own Georgian Revival headquarters in Richmond on Cutshaw Avenue between Hamilton Street and Kent Road for \$750,000.²¹ Both structures closely resemble both the Williamsburg Governor's Palace and the Equitable Life Insurance building prior to construction of the 1963 side wings.

¹⁹ *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, "Insurance Company Reports Rapid Growth," February 14, 1951: 12.

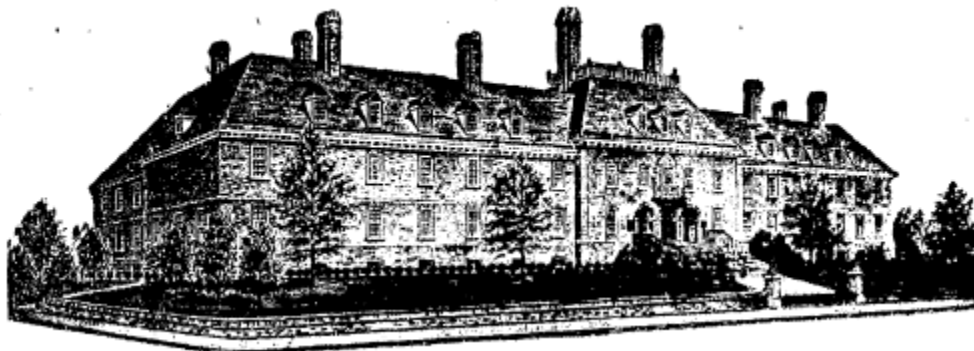
²⁰ *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, "Construction Permits Near \$2,000,000," September 7, 1949: 6.

The Home Beneficial Life Insurance Building is currently considered potentially eligible under Criterion C as an outstanding example of Colonial Revival architecture by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

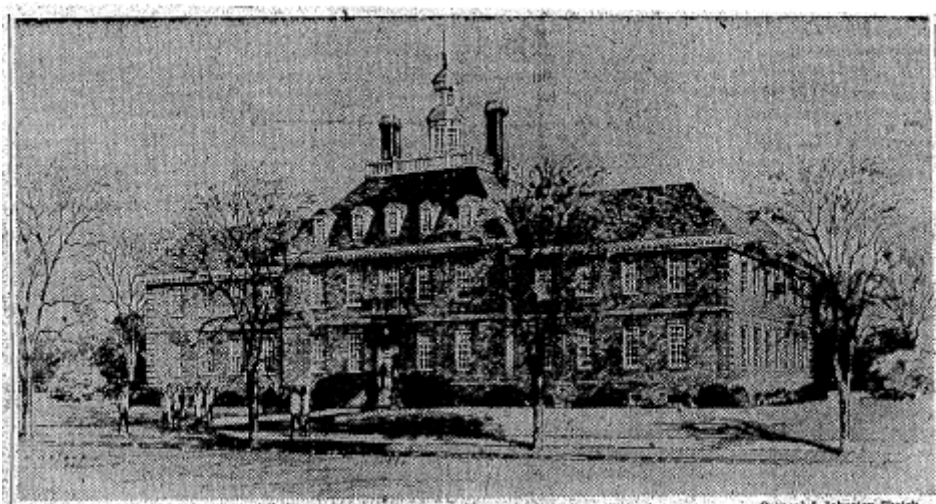
²¹ *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, "Lawyers Title Firm Plans New Building," July 8, 1958: 25.

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Rendering of Design for Home Beneficial Life Insurance Company Headquarters, Richmond, VA. Richmond Times-Dispatch, March 12, 1952: 15.



Rendering of Design for Lawyers Title Insurance Corporation Headquarters in Richmond, VA. Richmond Times-Dispatch, May 27, 1956: 10-B.

Colonial Revival

Colonial Revival refers to architecture that takes its inspiration from buildings erected during the American Colonial period of the 17th and 18th centuries. It encompasses a variety of substyles, including the more formal Georgian Revival, Dutch Revival, Federal Revival, and Southern Colonial. Colonial Revival buildings, like their historic forebears, typically incorporate rectangular forms, flat wall surfaces, gabled or hipped roofs clad in slate or shingle, multi-light windows, and dormers. Where added, wings were typically located on the side of the building, rather than at the front or back.²² Because it is based on styles that were originally popular during

²² James C. Massey & Shirley Maxwell, "The Formal Revivals: The Colonial and Georgian Styles of the 20th Century," *Old House Journal* (March-April 1991): 51-52.

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the Revolutionary War period, Colonial Revival has come to be viewed as uniquely American and representative of the best of American history. Following a dormant period during the early and mid-nineteenth century, styles inspired by the Colonial period have been consistently popular; accordingly, Colonial Revival is also viewed by many as having timeless appeal.

Colonial Revival began to flourish in the United States beginning in the 1880s. The resurgence in popularity of the Colonial style is believed to have stemmed from the Philadelphia Centennial of 1876, which awoke an interest in rediscovering the colonial roots of the United States and locating a distinctively American style. Another influence was the 1877 tour of New England undertaken by architects McKim, Mead & White, during which they studied and recorded Georgian and Federal houses. The three architects formed their eponymous firm a year later and went on to design several notable Colonial Revival homes, including the Appleton House in Lenox, Massachusetts.²³ Yet another influence was the restoration of Independence Hall in 1898, which returned the building to its appearance at the time of the Revolutionary War.²⁴ Publications such as the *White Pine Series of Architectural Monographs* also contributed to the popularity of Colonial Revival. The *White Pine Series*, issued from 1915 to 1940, documented early American structures through photographs and measured drawings and, at the peak of publication, had over 9,800 architects and designers as subscribers.²⁵

In the initial years of the revival, the Colonial style was usually interpreted loosely, and revival buildings were more heavily ornamented and more irregular in form than their historic counterparts.²⁶ Earlier Colonial Revival structures were most commonly residential. But beginning in the early twentieth century, civic buildings were also frequently built in the Colonial Revival style. The style was particularly popular for town halls during this period, including the Fairlee Town Hall in Fairlee, Vermont (1913).²⁷ World War I brought an additional surge in the popularity of Colonial Revival as an expression of patriotic sentiment, and housing for war workers during this period was usually designed in this style.²⁸ (Examples of Colonial Revival developments built for war workers include Remington Village and Black Rock Gardens, both located in Bridgeport, Connecticut.²⁹) By this point, Colonial Revival buildings more closely resembled actual buildings of the Colonial period and were more

²³ Historic New England, "Architectural Style Guide: Colonial Revival," <http://www.historicnewengland.org/preservation/your-older-or-historic-home/architectural-style-guide#colonial-revival-1880-1955> (accessed November 30, 2016).

²⁴ National Register of Historic Places, Queens County Savings Bank, Kew Gardens Hills, Queens County, New York, National Register #05000620, section 8, page 5.

²⁵ Northeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association, "The White Pine Monographs," <http://www.nelma.org/library/the-white-pine-monographs/> (accessed May 19, 2017).

²⁶ James C. Massey & Shirley Maxwell, "The Formal Revivals: The Colonial and Georgian Styles of the 20th Century," *Old House Journal* (March-April 1991): 49.

²⁷ National Register of Historic Places, Fairlee Town Hall, Fairlee, Orange County, Vermont, National Register # 14000044, section 7, page 4.

²⁸ William B. Rhoads, "The Colonial Revival and American Nationalism," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Dec., 1976): 239-249.

²⁹ National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form, Wartime Emergency Housing in Bridgeport, 1916-1920, Bridgeport, Fairfax County, Connecticut, National Register #64500081, section F II, page 1.

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restrained in their ornamentation.³⁰ Colonial Revival remained popular throughout the 1920s, particularly in residential architecture. Interpretations of the style appeared both in the mansions of the wealthy and in the more modest houses of the middle class.³¹

As Colonial Revival's popularity increased, landmark buildings of the Colonial period became models for reproductions and reinterpretations. Two of the most copied were George Washington's Mt. Vernon and Independence Hall of Philadelphia. Several reproductions were constructed for expositions: for example, the 1893 Chicago World's Fair had replicas of both Independence Hall and Mount Vernon, constructed respectively as the Pennsylvania and Virginia State Buildings. Other replicas of Mt. Vernon tended to be residential, and included the Pope-Riddle House now located in Farmington, Connecticut (McKim, Mead & White with Theodate Pope Riddle, 1898-1902). An example of a Mt. Vernon replica constructed for non-residential use was the Rainier Chapter House of the Daughters of the American Revolution in Seattle, Washington (Daniel Riggs Huntington, 1925).³² Independence Hall inspired more commercial copies. An early example of a commercial reproduction of Independence Hall was McKim, Mead & White's design for the Garden City Hotel in Long Island, New York (c.1900, demolished 1973).³³ Another Independence Hall replica was the Live Stock National Bank in Chicago, Illinois, later known as the Stock Yards National Bank (Abraham Epstein, 1925; designated a City of Chicago landmark in 2008).³⁴

Colonial Revival's popularity surged again during the 1930s following the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, which began in the late 1920s. The restoration of Williamsburg was inspired by the fashion for the Colonial style, but it also fueled it: "As a symbol, the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg and the Colonial National Park was the principal event that helped to promote the colonial revival of the thirties."³⁵ In addition to several historic colonial buildings, Williamsburg itself became the site of several replica buildings, including the Governor's Palace and the Capitol. The reconstructions of these buildings were based on the "Bodleian Plate," an engraved copperplate dating to about 1740 that is the only depiction of the chief buildings of Williamsburg as they originally appeared. It was uncovered in the Bodleian Library at Oxford in

³⁰ Massey and Maxwell, 49.

³¹ Massey and Maxwell, 50.

³² Daughters of the American Revolution, "Rainier Chapter House," <http://www.dar.org/national-society/historic-sites-and-properties/rainier-chapter-house-0> (accessed April 18, 2017).

³³ National Register of Historic Places, Queens County Savings Bank, Kew Gardens Hills, Queens County, New York, National Register #05000620, section 8, page 6; Garden City Hotel, "Our Hotel," <http://www.gardencityhotel.com/our-hotel/history> (accessed April 13, 2017).

³⁴ *Chicago Tribune*, "A Bid to Save a Piece of the Past," http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2006-05-21/news/0605210248_1_stockyards-bank-building-south-side (accessed April 13, 2017); City of Chicago, "Stock Yards National Bank (Former)," <https://webapps.cityofchicago.org/landmarksweb/web/landmarkdetails.htm?lanId=13087> (accessed April 18, 2017).

³⁵ David Gebhard, "The American Colonial Revival in the 1930s," *Winterthur Portfolio* Vol 22, No 2/3 (Summer-Autumn, 1987): 117.

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1929, in time to provide guidance for the reconstruction of the buildings as part of the Colonial Williamsburg project.³⁶

Colonial Williamsburg captured the popular imagination almost immediately. Guest registers from prior to World War II indicate that visitors came from every state and many foreign countries. Articles on Williamsburg appeared in a variety of publications. But these appearances were not orchestrated by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (CWF); rather, they were spurred by tremendous public interest.³⁷ The CWF architectural staff soon began to receive requests for plans, specifications, photographs, and paint formulas from across the country. Although there was demand for architectural specifications to erect reproductions of historic Williamsburg buildings, the architectural staff declined to provide them, as they were concerned about promoting the construction of Williamsburg replicas in inappropriate locales and settings.³⁸ The CWF architects were more willing to assist with the design of buildings that incorporated elements of Colonial Williamsburg architecture rather than replications. The most prominent examples were the three Williamsburg-inspired houses drawn by CWF architects Perry, Shaw & Hepburn for *House & Garden* in 1937 as part of a series of home designs intended to be made available for purchase to the public. Of the three, only drawings for the first were ever completed and sold. The design borrowed details from Williamsburg buildings the Pitt house, the Travis house, the Market Square Kitchen, the Market Square Tavern, and the Robert Carter House.³⁹

As part of the renewed interest in Colonial Revival generated by Williamsburg, the style became increasingly popular for commercial properties. Larger commercial buildings tended to reinterpret mid-eighteenth-century Georgian buildings, while smaller buildings interpreted a wider range of colonial styles.⁴⁰ Automobile-oriented architecture, such as service stations, motels, and restaurants, was often built in the Colonial Revival style during this period.⁴¹ Mt. Vernon in particular inspired a number of copies across the country in the form of motels, marked by red, hipped roofs; balustrades; and cupolas.⁴² Colonial-inspired office and retail buildings also began to appear, such as the Music Corporation of America Building in Beverly Hills, California, a recreation of a Georgian mansion set in a colonial garden (Paul R. Williams, 1938; recipient of the AIA Award of Merit, Southern California Chapter, 1939).⁴³ The style also continued to be used for civic buildings, including the Delaware Legislative Hall (E. William

³⁶ George Humphrey Yetter, *Williamsburg Before and After: The Rebirth of Virginia's Colonial Capitol* (Williamsburg, Virginia: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1988), 66.

³⁷ Thomas J. Taylor, "The Williamsburg Restoration and Its Reception by the American Public: 1926-1942" (PhD diss., George Washington University, 1989), 4-5.

³⁸ Taylor, 216-218.

³⁹ Taylor, 269-272.

⁴⁰ Gebhard, 141.

⁴¹ Gebhard, 141-142.

⁴² Pogue.

⁴³ Paul R. Williams Project, "MCA/Litton Industries, Beverly Hills, CA,"

<http://www.paulrwilliamsproject.org/gallery/1930s-office-buildings/> (accessed April 18, 2017).

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Martin, 1931-1933).⁴⁴ It was popular for post offices, town halls, churches, and educational buildings, connecting Colonial Revival to civic life and tradition. In the style of historic Colonial civic buildings, these buildings often incorporated side wings and central cupolas.⁴⁵

Beginning in the 1940s, Colonial Revival's popularity began to wane as the popularity of Modernist architecture rose. However, Colonial Revival never completely departed from the architecture scene, remaining more popular in residential architecture but making occasional appearances in commercial buildings. From about 1945 to 1960, the style was especially popular for churches, since, according to Dale Dowling, the style communicated "a sense of peace, simplicity, and honesty" to families that had lived through the war period.⁴⁶ Since 1950, the style has remained "continuously popular but never dominant."⁴⁷ In spite of Colonial Revival's diminished popularity, replica buildings continued to appear occasionally in the architectural landscape. One fine example is the Queens County Savings Bank in Kew Gardens Hills, Queens County, New York, which was based on Independence Hall (Harold O. Carlson, 1953-1954; listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2005). At the bank's dedication ceremony, its president, Joseph Upton, characterized Independence Hall and, by extension, the new bank building as "symbolic of the freedom and character of the American people to progress and grow," utilizing the idealized past as a public relations strategy.⁴⁸ Another later example is the Bank of Monticello in Monticello, Georgia, constructed 1963 and modelled on Thomas Jefferson's Monticello.⁴⁹ A residential replica of Monticello, "Whitecello" in Chatham, Virginia, was also constructed in 1959 for Joseph Whitehead, Jr. as a residence.⁵⁰

The Colonial Revival Style in Washington, D.C.

The Colonial Revival style historically has been quite popular in Washington, D.C. and the surrounding area. Pamela Scott suggests that this popularity is connected in part to nostalgia for the Revolutionary era and the founders of the District of Columbia—including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison—and in part to an especially strong affinity felt by residents, especially government employees, for "American values" associated with Colonial architecture and embodied in the Colonial Revival style. The popularity of Colonial Revival has also been informed by D.C.'s location in the mid-Atlantic region, near many examples of original Colonial-era buildings.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Susan W. Thrane and Tom Patterson, *State Houses: America's 50 State Capitol Buildings* (Erin, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 2005), 259.

⁴⁵ Gebhard, 141-142.

⁴⁶ Dale Dowling, "For God, for Family, For Country: Colonial Revival Church Buildings in the Cold War Era" (PhD diss., George Washington University, 2004), xi, 30.

⁴⁷ Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 489

⁴⁸ National Register of Historic Places, Queens County Savings Bank, Kew Gardens Hills, Queens County, New York, National Register #05000620, section 8, page 3.

⁴⁹ Bank of Monticello, "About Us," <http://www.bankofmonticello.com/aboutus.htm> (accessed April 18, 2017).

⁵⁰ Henry H. Mitchell, "Founding Father Flattery," <http://www.victorianvilla.com/sims-mitchell/local/foundingfatherflattery.htm> (accessed April 18, 2017).

⁵¹ Pamela Scott, "Residential Architecture of Washington, D.C., and Its Suburbs," <https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/adecenter/essays/Scott.html> (accessed May 16, 2017).

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In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Colonial and Georgian Revival styles were popular for large, single-family residences, including Causeway (now Tregaron) (1912) and the White-Meyer House (1912-1913). Beginning in the early twentieth century, Colonial and Georgian Revival style architecture benefitted from the endorsement of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and became the standard for municipal architecture in the District of Columbia. In 1911, the Commission suggested that Georgian Revival was the most suitable style for public school buildings within the District, preferring it over Elizabethan Revival or Victorian styles.⁵² This position influenced the design of many school buildings within the District of Columbia built from the 1910s through the 1930s, including the Miner Teachers College (Leon Dessez, 1914), and Woodrow Wilson High School (Albert Harris, 1935).⁵³ Other municipal buildings were also constructed in the Colonial Revival style, including the Banneker Recreation Center at 2500 Georgia Ave., N.W. (1934). Colonial and Georgian Revival were also employed for hospital and institutional buildings, including the Walter Reed General Hospital (1908, additions 1914-1992), which, like 3900 Wisconsin Avenue, has a grand front drive.⁵⁴ Two more examples of institutional use are King Hall (1916) and the mess hall (1920) at the Armed Forces Retirement Home, both contributing structures to the Armed Forces Retirement Home National Register Historic District.⁵⁵

During the 1930s and 1940s, many residential developments in D.C. were constructed in the Colonial Revival style. These included developments of single-family homes, like Colonial Village, begun in 1931, which eventually included eighty houses based on Colonial-era structures such as George Washington's boyhood home.⁵⁶ Another example is Colony Hill, a collection of forty-three houses built by developers Boss and Phelps (1931).⁵⁷ Also constructed were several apartment developments, including McLean Gardens immediately to the south of 3900 Wisconsin Avenue, NW (1942).

As elsewhere in the United States, fewer Colonial or Georgian Revival style buildings were built in D.C. during the 1950s and later. Although the Colonial Revival style remained popular in some of the D.C. area's residential neighborhoods dating to the 1950s and later—for example, the Fox Hill subdivision in Potomac, Maryland, which was built in the 1960s—the Equitable

⁵² Sue A. Kohler, *The Commission of Fine Arts, a Brief History, 1910-1995* (Washington, D.C.: Commission of Fine Arts, 1996), 43.

⁵³ Kimberly Prothro Williams, "Schools for All – A History of DC Public School Buildings 1804-1960" [Brochure] (Washington, D.C.: D.C. Preservation League, 2008), 15-18.

⁵⁴ D.C. Office of Planning, Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC) Historic District Nomination, <https://planning.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/op/publication/attachments/Walter%20Reed%20FINAL%20NOM%20SIGNED%20BY%20KEEPER.pdf> (accessed May 19, 2017).

Additional Colonial and Georgian Revival buildings are found within the Walter Reed Historic District, with dates of construction ranging from 1910 to 1954.

⁵⁵ National Register of Historic Places, Armed Forces Retirement Home, Washington, D.C., National Register #07001237, section 7, pages 41 and 48.

⁵⁶ Marvin Caplan and Ralph Blessing, "Shepherd Park," in *Washington At Home*, ed. Kathryn Schneider Smith (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 455.

⁵⁷ Bridget Hall, "Historic Touches Help Colony Hill Hold Fast to Past," *Washington Post*, September 6, 1997, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/realestate/1997/09/06/historic-touches-help-colony-hill-hold-fast-to-past/27e59a3c-9666-45dd-88cc-8ac9f9bdfce2/?utm_term=.99cfa3ab9547 (accessed May 15, 2017).

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Life Insurance Building represents one of the last large-scale buildings in Washington DC designed in the Colonial or Georgian Revival styles.

Among the D.C. designers that favored the Colonial Revival was Arthur B. Heaton, who designed many single-family homes based on mid-Atlantic, brick, colonial houses, including his own home, "Wendover," in Spring Valley (1929).⁵⁸ Another was Albert L. Harris, who began his career with Hornblower and Marshall, and later served as Municipal Architect from 1921-1933. Harris designed a variety of Colonial Revival municipal buildings for the District of Columbia, including Woodrow Wilson High School, introduced above. Together, Harris and Heaton designed the Colonial Revival style Corcoran Hall on the campus of George Washington University.⁵⁹ Washington, D.C.'s mail-order house design business, Standard Homes Company, produced a variety of low-to-medium cost designs for single-family homes, most of which were Colonial Revival.⁶⁰

Architect – Leon Chatelain, Jr.

Leon Chatelain, Jr. was one of Washington's most celebrated mid-20th century architects. Known for his skill with working with traditional architectural styles, his *Washington Post* obituary names the Equitable Life Insurance Headquarters among his five most notable buildings. The others included were the Kiplinger Building, the Westmoreland Congregational Church, the Washington Gas Light Company headquarters, and the Suffridge Building. His firm was responsible for numerous other bank and office buildings, several C&P Telephone Buildings, as well as a variety of residential projects.⁶¹

Born in Washington, DC, in 1902, Chatelain, Jr. attended George Washington University before working for Waddy Butler Wood, a noted Washington architect. Despite not having a professional architectural degree, Chatelain became a registered architect under the laws of the District of Columbia. He began his own practice in 1930 when Wood's firm became unable to pay its employees. His rationale for starting his own firm at such a low point economically was that he could work for free for someone else or he could work for free for himself, and working for himself sounded like a better idea.⁶² In March and April 1935 he wrote six columns in *The Washington Post* on the merits of using architects for residential projects, promoting his profession if not his personal services. In 1956 he formed the architectural firm of Chatelain, Gauger & Nolan.⁶³ In 1970, he formed a new firm, Chatelain, Samperton & Nolan before retiring in 1974.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Pamela Scott, "Residential Architecture of Washington, D.C., and Its Suburbs," <https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/adecenter/essays/Scott.html> (accessed May 16, 2017).

⁵⁹ National Register of Historic Places, Corcoran Hall, Washington, District of Columbia, National Register #90001545.

⁶⁰ Pamela Scott, "Residential Architecture of Washington, D.C., and Its Suburbs," <https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/adecenter/essays/Scott.html> (accessed May 16, 2017).

⁶¹ *Washington Post*, "Noted District Architect Leon Chatelain Jr. Dies" May 8, 1979: C6.

⁶² Leon Chatelain Jr., interview by Emily Hotaling Eig, 1975.

⁶³ Leon Chatelain Jr., interview by Emily Hotaling Eig, 1975.

⁶⁴ *Washington Post*, "Noted District Architect Leon Chatelain Jr. Dies" May 8, 1979: C6.

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Chatelain, Jr.'s 10-story Kiplinger Building (1729 H Street, N.W.) was designed in 1949 in the Stripped Classical style. It is listed as an individual landmark in the DC Inventory and in the National Register of Historic Places. The Washington Gas Light Company Headquarters at 11th and H Streets, NW. was designed in 1940 by Chatelain, Jr. and Jarrett C. White and retains the features that define it as an example of Art Moderne. The Suffridge Building at 1775 K Street, N.W., constructed in 1970, represented a distinct change in style from Chatelain, Jr.'s earlier work. Its late Modernism appearance is likely the product of his partners in Chatelain, Samperton & Nolan.

Chatelain's fame, however, was equally garnered by his contribution to the architectural profession. He held a variety of leadership positions, including president of the Washington Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, founder and president of the Washington Building Congress, chairman of the National Commission on the Architectural Barriers to the Handicapped, and a member of the President's Commission on Employing the Handicapped, culminating in his election as the national president of the American Institute of Architects in 1956. His civic contribution extended beyond the architectural profession, as he served as president of the Washington Board of Trade (1948), the Kiwanis Club, and the Metropolitan Police Boys Club, among numerous other organizations.⁶⁵ Chatelain was also an AIA Fellow, an Honorary Member of the RIBA, RAIC Honorary Fellow, Honorary Fellow of the Philippine Institute of Architects, and received the French Medal of the Conseil Supérieur. He died in 1977 at the age of 75.⁶⁶

3900 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.

Prior to 1907, the land at 3900 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W. belonged to Richard H. Goldsborough, a real estate developer, in partnership with F.C. and C.W. Garnett.⁶⁷ It was adjacent to the seventy-five-acre estate of newspaperman John Roll McLean, who hired architect John Russell Pope to design a Georgian Revival mansion for his property, which McLean named "Friendship." McLean's home, demolished in 1942, may have influenced the decision of Equitable Life to design their headquarters in the Georgian Revival style.⁶⁸ By 1909, Goldsborough and the Garnetts had sold the future Equitable Life property to Christian Heurich, owner of the eponymous local brewery that operated between 1872 and 1956.⁶⁹ Historic maps indicate that, between 1925 and 1931, Heurich sold the property to Thomas Sidwell, founder of

⁶⁵ *Washington Post*, "Noted District Architect Leon Chatelain Jr. Dies" May 8, 1979: C6.

⁶⁶ *Washington Post*, "Noted District Architect Leon Chatelain Jr. Dies," May 8, 1979: C6.

⁶⁷ G.W. Baist, *Baist's Real Estate Atlas of Surveys of Washington, District of Columbia: Complete in Four Volumes* (Philadelphia: G.W. Baist, 1907), Vol. 3, Plate 29; William H. Boyd, *Boyd's Directory of the District of Columbia* (Washington, D.C.: William H. Boyd, 1899), 479

⁶⁸ McLean Gardens, "History,"

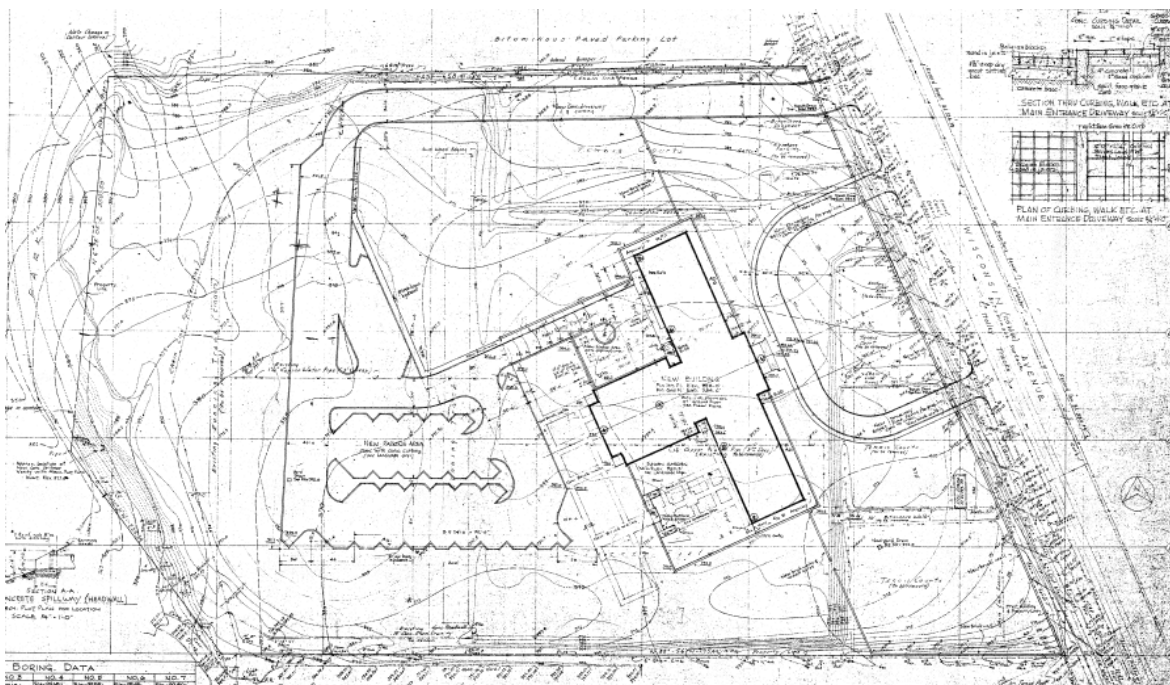
http://www.mcleangardens.com/sub_category_list.asp?category=20&title=History (accessed April 25, 2017).

⁶⁹ G.W. Baist, *Baist's Real Estate Atlas of Surveys of Washington, District of Columbia: Complete in Four Volumes* (Philadelphia: G.W. Baist, 1909), Vol. 3, Plate 29; Mark Benbow, "Christian Heurich (1842-1945)," *Immigrant Entrepreneurship*, <http://immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entry.php?rec=38> (accessed December 15, 2016).

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the Sidwell Friends School.⁷⁰ Sidwell Friends had been located at 3901 Wisconsin Avenue, across the street from the future 3900 Wisconsin Avenue, since 1911.⁷¹ Sidwell later sold the property back to Heurich between 1937 and 1945.⁷² However, Sidwell Friends continued to use the land as an athletic field.⁷³



Selection from 1956 Plot Plan for 3900 Wisconsin Avenue (received from Fannie Mae)

Equitable Life purchased the property from Heurich and began construction on its new headquarters in 1956. The builder was Joseph Nebel Co. and the architect was Leon Chatelain, Jr. of Chatelain, Gauger & Nolan. Chatelain was chosen as the architect in part because of his position on the board of directors for Equitable Life.⁷⁴ The building was designed and constructed with the expectation that more space might be needed in the future and that additions

⁷⁰ G.W. Baist, *Baist's Real Estate Atlas of Surveys of Washington, District of Columbia: Complete in Four Volumes* (Philadelphia: G.W. Baist, 1925), Vol. 3, Plate 29; G.W. Baist, *Baist's Real Estate Atlas of Surveys of Washington, District of Columbia: Complete in Four Volumes* (Philadelphia: G.W. Baist, 1931), Vol. 3, Plate 29.

⁷¹ Sidwell Friends School, "History,"

[http://www.sidwell.edu/\(X\(1\)S\(2dho5wrxvajnvu3rkblxss45\)\)/about_sfs/history/index.aspx](http://www.sidwell.edu/(X(1)S(2dho5wrxvajnvu3rkblxss45))/about_sfs/history/index.aspx) (accessed December 15, 2016).

⁷² G.W. Baist, *Baist's Real Estate Atlas of Surveys of Washington, District of Columbia: Complete in Four Volumes* (Philadelphia: G.W. Baist, 1937), Vol. 3, Plate 29; G.W. Baist, *Baist's Real Estate Atlas of Surveys of Washington, District of Columbia: Complete in Four Volumes* (Philadelphia: G.W. Baist, 1945), Vol. 3, Plate 29

⁷³ *Evening Star*, "Doggy Demonstration," October 7, 1956: 169.

⁷⁴ Leon Chatelain III, interview by Kendra Parzen and Emily Eig, May 2017.

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would then be added.⁷⁵ A 1957 article in the *Evening Star* indicates that, despite its Georgian Revival style exterior, the Equitable Life building has a steel frame.⁷⁶ The original design for the site included what is now the central portion of the building as well as the front driveway, which was paved in Belgian block, and its adjacent sidewalk, which was paved in brick. It also included the low brick wall that currently separates the property from the street.⁷⁷



The Governor's Palace in Colonial Williamsburg (Wikimedia Commons)

While significantly larger overall, the Equitable Life building takes clear cues from the Governor's Palace of Williamsburg, Virginia. The similarities between the two buildings are meticulous and deliberate: in preparation for the design, Chatelain sent employees of his firm to Williamsburg to measure the Governor's Palace.⁷⁸ The central portion of the Equitable Life building and the Governor's Palace are each five bays wide and two and a half stories tall at the front. Atop the roof, each building has a white, wood balustrade and a central, two-story, wood cupola. Each building also has large brick chimneys to either side, although the larger Equitable Life building has four, while the Governor's Palace has two. Like the Governor's Palace, the Equitable Life building is clad in brick laid in a Flemish bond. On both buildings, a redder brick

⁷⁵ Equitable Life Insurance Company of Washington, "New Home Office of the Equitable Life Insurance Company" [Pamphlet], courtesy of Leon Chatelain III.

Although it was never built, a 1953 zoning study by Chatelain, Gauger & Nolan also explored the possibility of building a large block of apartments at the west end of the lot (study courtesy of Leon Chatelain III).

⁷⁶ *Evening Star*, "Home for Insurance Firm Rises," June 22, 1957: 26.

⁷⁷ Chatelain, Gauger & Nolan, *The Home Office Building for Equitable Life Insurance Company* [Drawing Set], August 22, 1956, page A1.

⁷⁸ Leon Chatelain III, interview by Kendra Parzen and Emily Eig, May 2017.

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is used for window headers and surrounds and as a string course visually separating the first and second floors. Both buildings have a steeply-pitched slate roof and hipped dormers, as well as a molded wood cornice with small dentils, painted white. The Equitable Life building's large side wings correlate in placement to the two secondary buildings of the Governor's Palace property. However, the Equitable Life building also departs from Governor's Palace in some notable instances. For example, where the side wings of the Governor's Palace have no openings facing the front, both of the Equitable Life building's wings have forward-facing fenestration. The side wings of the Equitable Life building are also set further back in relation to the main block than those at the Governor's Palace, with the result that they do not obscure the main block when viewed from the side.



Rendering of the Equitable Life Insurance Company by Leon Chatelain (Courtesy of Leon Chatelain III)

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*Equitable Life Headquarters before
construction of the side wings, c.1958-1962 (Courtesy of Leon Chatelain III)*

The building dedication for the Equitable Life Insurance Building was held on November 6, 1958 and attracted a crowd of more than five hundred business and civic leaders.⁷⁹ A pamphlet on the new headquarters produced by Equitable Life noted that the company desired “architecture that would be satisfying and attractive during the entire life of the building.” Williamsburg was chosen as the inspiration because it was “part of our finest heritage” and because its designs were eminently suitable for the Tidewater region. The pamphlet highlighted the extreme care that was taken to marry the atmosphere of Colonial Virginia with the needs of a modern office building, including using handmade and wood-fired brick to replicate as closely as possible the appearance of a Colonial building.⁸⁰ In an interview given in 1962, Equitable Life Insurance president Charles E. Phillips relayed that he had waited twenty years to purchase the right site for his company’s building. He chose the Colonial Revival style to better fit into the surrounding residential neighborhood and because he felt colonial buildings “had held up well, would be timeless, and reflect the old roots of the insurance business.” The unnamed interviewer noted that the building was a reproduction of the Governor’s Palace in Williamsburg and reported that the spacious lobby was lit by electric candelabra chandeliers.⁸¹

⁷⁹ *Evening Star*, “Equitable Life Dedicates New Home Office” November 7, 1958: 25.

⁸⁰ Equitable Life Insurance Company of Washington, “New Home Office of the Equitable Life Insurance Company” [Pamphlet], courtesy of Leon Chatelain III.

⁸¹ *Evening Star*, “New Trade Board Head Wants ‘Right’ Industries,” May 24, 1962: A19.

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In 1959, the building's landscaping received an award from the American Association of Nurserymen for excellence in industrial landscaping work, which recognized it as among the top ten industrial landscaping projects of the year nationwide. The award-winning design by landscape architect Boris Timochenko was executed by A. Gude Sons Co., Inc. of Rockville, MD.⁸²

On March 2, 1963, the *Evening Star* reported that Equitable Life Insurance had been granted a permit to erect a four-story addition at a cost of \$900,000. The addition would also be designed by Leon Chatelain's firm of Chatelain, Gauger & Nolan.⁸³ At the time of the construction of the original building, extra brick had been created in anticipation of future additions; thus, Chatelain could exactly match the brick of the new additions to the brick of the original building.⁸⁴



The Equitable Life Insurance Building after construction of the side wings (Courtesy of Leon Chatelain III)

⁸² *Evening Star*, "Firms Win Awards for Planning," November 14, 1959: B5.

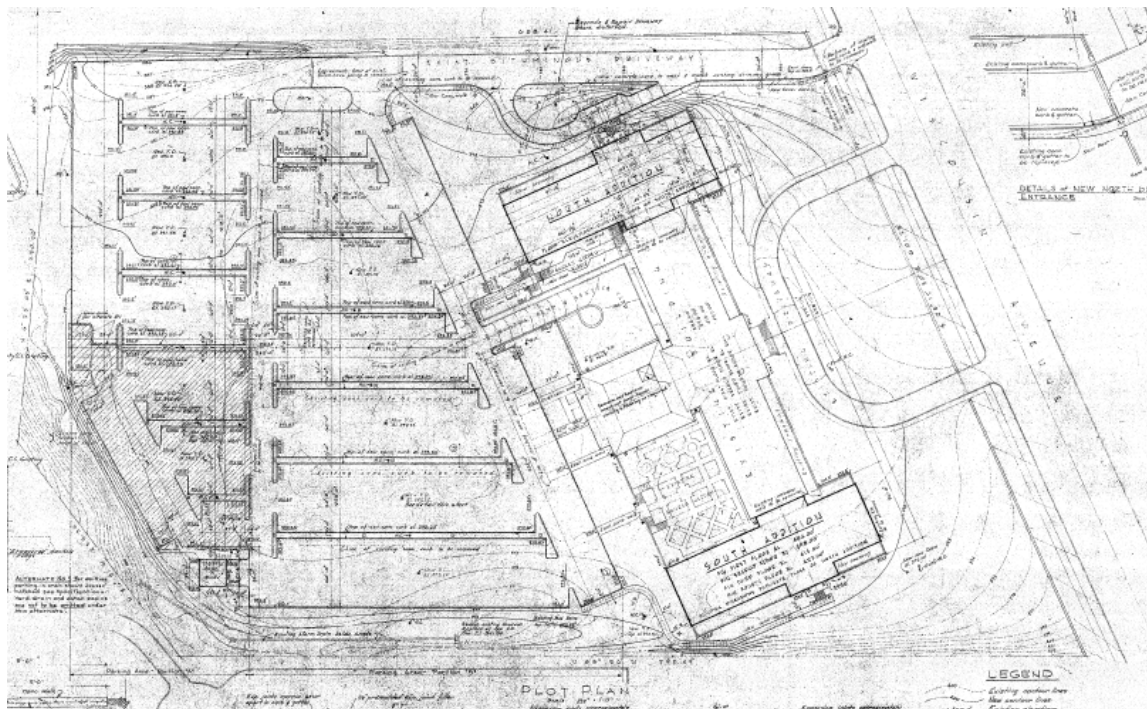
⁸³ *Evening Star*, "District Building Permits," March 3, 1963: 25

⁸⁴ Leon Chatelain III, interview by Kendra Parzen and Emily Eig, May 2017.

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While the front lawn was not altered, a drop-off drive was added to reach the side entrance in the building's new north wing and a walk was added on the south side of the property connecting the south wing entrance to the parking area.⁸⁵ In 1964, craftsman Atlee Whiteleather of William F. Negson, Inc., received an award commending the intricate detail of the exterior brickwork of the addition.⁸⁶ In January 1968, the building was the site of a major fire, which began in a storeroom in the south wing. Damage from the fire spread throughout the building, and repairs were estimated at \$100,000.⁸⁷



1963 Plot Plan by Chatelain, Gauger & Nolan (received from Fannie Mae)

In 1971, Equitable Life Insurance announced that they intended to build a \$46 million complex of offices and shops on the property, tearing down the existing Colonial Revival office building to make way for five new buildings.⁸⁸ However, the project was never realized. Instead, the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) purchased the property from Equitable Life in 1975 for \$13 million.⁸⁹ Although Fannie Mae intended to move into the building in 1977, renovations took longer than the projected six months.⁹⁰ Fannie Mae spent a total of \$37

⁸⁵ Chatelain, Gauger & Nolan, *Additions and Alterations to the Home Office Building for Equitable Life Insurance Company, 3900 Wisconsin Ave., N.W., Washington, DC* [Drawing Set], August 17, 1962.

⁸⁶ *Evening Star*, "Awards Set for Craftsmen," July 10, 1964: 70.

⁸⁷ *Evening Star*, "Damage is Put at \$100,000," January 13, 1966: B1.

⁸⁸ *Washington Post*, "Insurance Firm Plans Big Complex," September 24, 1971: C1.

⁸⁹ *Washington Post*, "Area Headquarters Bought by FNMA," November 5, 1975: B7.

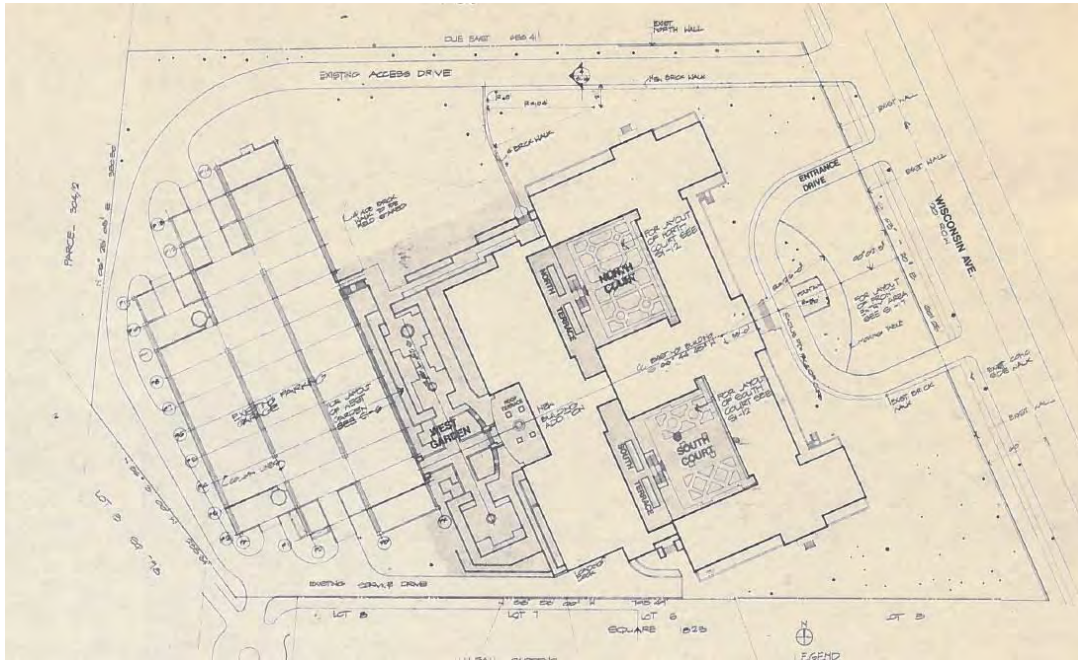
It is not known why Fannie Mae decided to retain the existing building rather than demolish and build a new headquarters.

⁹⁰ *Evening Star*, No Title, November 1, 1975: 20.

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million relocating its headquarters to the building from a downtown office building, including the addition of the rear wing, designed by John Carl Warnecke & Associates to be compatible with the existing building.



1977 Site Plan by John Carl Warnecke Architects (From Fannie Mae)



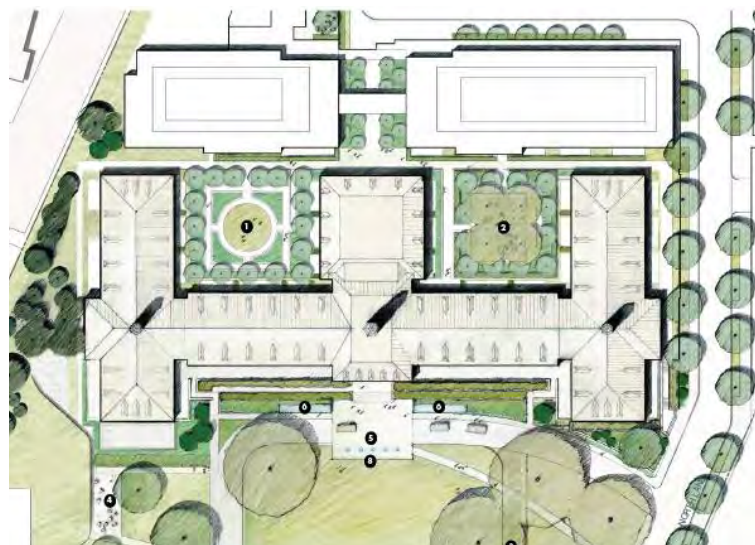
West elevation of center block of 1978 addition (2018)

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When Fannie Mae occupied the renovated building in 1979, there were 560 employees working on eleven floors.⁹¹ As part of the changes, Fannie Mae added the fountain that currently sits in front of the building at the top of the circular drive and re-landscaped the courtyards.⁹² Meanwhile, Equitable Life formed Equitable General as a Virginia corporation and holding company in 1974 so that it could expand into new businesses outside the insurance field; in 1978, Equitable General merged with Great Southern Life Insurance Corp. of Houston.⁹³

In 2017, Fannie Mae sold its iconic headquarters at 3900 Wisconsin Avenue. The joint venture of D.C.-based Roadside Development and North American Sekisui House (NASH) purchased the building and its ten-acre lot with plans to develop the site into an “urban village.” In December 2017, the building and three of its ten acres were designated as a D.C. Landmark. One year later, in December 2018, the development team broke ground on what will be an extensive mixed-use development. In addition to the removal of the 1978 addition and the renovation and adaptive use of the original Equitable Life Insurance Company building, the 10-acre site will include eight new buildings to accommodate 652 residential units; a 150-key hotel; 153,000 square feet of retain space; and 62,000 square feet of office space. Two of the new buildings will be located on the site of the now-demolished 1978 addition and within the National Register boundaries of the site. The other buildings are outside the boundaries.



Overall concept plan for two new buildings at west rear of historic building (Roadside Development, 2018).

⁹¹ *Washington Post*, “Fannie Mae Moves to Colonial-Style Site,” June 19, 1979: D7.

⁹² John Carl Warnecke Architects, *Federal National Mortgage Association: Home Office, 3900 Wisconsin Avenue Northwest, Washington, D.C. 20016* [Drawing Set], October 1977.

⁹³ Jerry Knight, “Area Firm Attacked on Stock Deal: 3 Stockholders Attack Equitable General Board,” *Washington Post*: D7; Jerry Knight, “Equitable General to Merge with Great Southern Corp.,” *Washington Post*, April 15, 1978: D8.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acree of Property 5.25 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

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

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- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 38.94045 | Longitude: -77.07674 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or
UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

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

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

The building is located on 5.25 acres of the 10-acre Lot 801 in square 1823. From a point forming the southeast corner of Lot 801, the boundaries extend north along the property line that parallels Wisconsin Avenue, NW to a point approximately fifty-nine feet north of the north end of the building, then west to a point marking the rear wall of the 1978 addition to the building, then due south to the southern edge of the lot line of Lot 801, then westerly back to the starting point, according to the boundary map included in this nomination.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries encompass the main block and end wings of the historic building, constructed 1958 and 1963. The boundaries also include the site of the 1978 rear addition, demolished 2019 and the front drive and landscaped yard. The boundaries provide an appropriate

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Kendra Parzen, Historic Preservation Specialist, and Emily Eig, President

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street & number: 440 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.

city or town: Washington state: DC zip code: 20003

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date: 8/14/2017

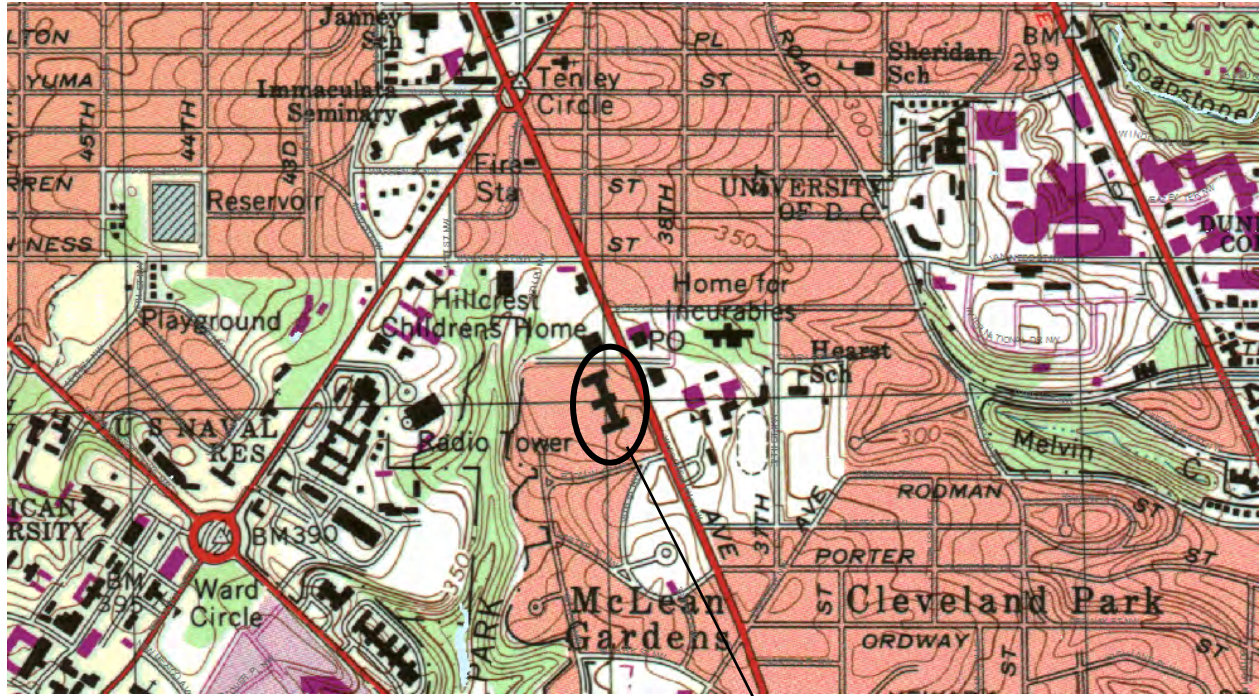
Additional Documentation

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.)

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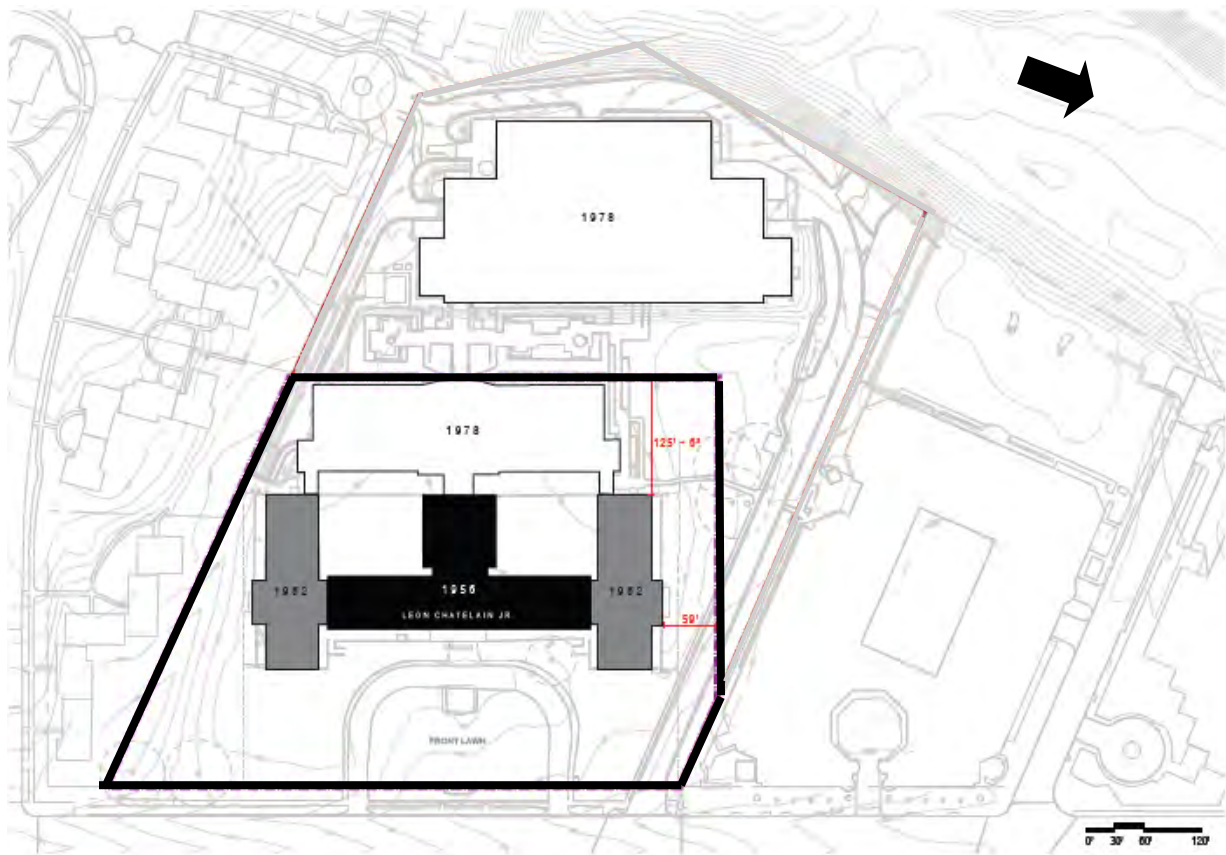


Equitable Life Insurance Building
3900 Wisconsin Avenue NW

Site Map
(USGS Map 7.5 Series 2016 – Washington West)
Latitude: 38.94045 and Longitude: -77.07674

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Map Showing National Register Boundaries with 1978 addition shown (demolished 2019)

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Photographs

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



Sketch Map Photo Key

Photo Log

Name of Property: 3900 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.

City or Vicinity: Washington

County: --

State: District of Columbia

Photographer: Photos 1-22 Kendra Parzen; Photos 23-26 Erin Howe

Date Photographed: December 1, 2017; April 2019

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

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Photo 1 of 26

Front (east) elevation facing southwest.

Photo 2 of 26

Front entrance and center hall front elevation, facing southwest.

Photo 3 of 26

Center hall roof with cupola and chimneys, facing west.

Photo 4 of 26

Front (east) elevation of south connector and north elevation of south wing, facing southwest.

Photo 5 of 26

East elevation of south wing, facing southwest.

Photo 6 of 26

South elevation of south wing, facing northwest.

Photo 7 of 26

South elevation entrance, facing north.

Photo 8 of 26

South elevation of south wing, including basement level, facing east.

Photo 9 of 26

West elevation of south wing and connection to 1978 addition, facing northeast.

Photo 10 of 26

South elevation of north wing with staircase to basement level, facing north.

Photo 11 of 26

East elevation of north wing, facing west.

Photo 12 of 26

North elevation of north wing, facing southwest.

Photo 13 of 26

North wing entrance, facing south.

Photo 14 of 26

North elevation of north wing, facing southwest.

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Photo 15 of 26

View from second floor onto north courtyard showing connection between north wing and 1978 addition, facing west.

Photo 16 of 26

View from second floor onto south courtyard showing south and west elevations of original 1950s section, facing northeast.

Photo 17 of 26

View from south courtyard showing south elevation of 1950s section, facing northwest.

Photo 18 of 26

Typical window of original 1950s section in south courtyard, facing southeast.

Photo 19 of 26

View of flagstone drive, front brick wall, and urn on brick pedestal at base of drive, facing west.

Photo 20 of 26

Molded doorway inside front lobby, facing west.

Photo 21 of 26

First floor central elevator bank, facing north.

Photo 22 of 26

Typical hallway and office space in north wing, second floor, facing east.

Photo 23 of 26

View looking east showing west elevation of center block of building

Photo 24 of 26

View looking east showing west elevation of center block and north end wing of building

Photo 25 of 26

View looking east showing west elevation of center block and south end wing of building

Photo 26 of 26

View looking south from center pavilion to south end wing

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.

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Photograph 1 of 26: Front (east) elevation facing southwest.

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Photograph 2 of 26: Front entrance and center hall front elevation, facing southwest.

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Photograph 3 of 26: Center hall roof with cupola and chimneys, facing west.

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Photograph 4 of 26: Front (east) elevation of south connector and north elevation of south wing, facing southwest.

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Photograph 5 of 26: East elevation of south wing, facing southwest.

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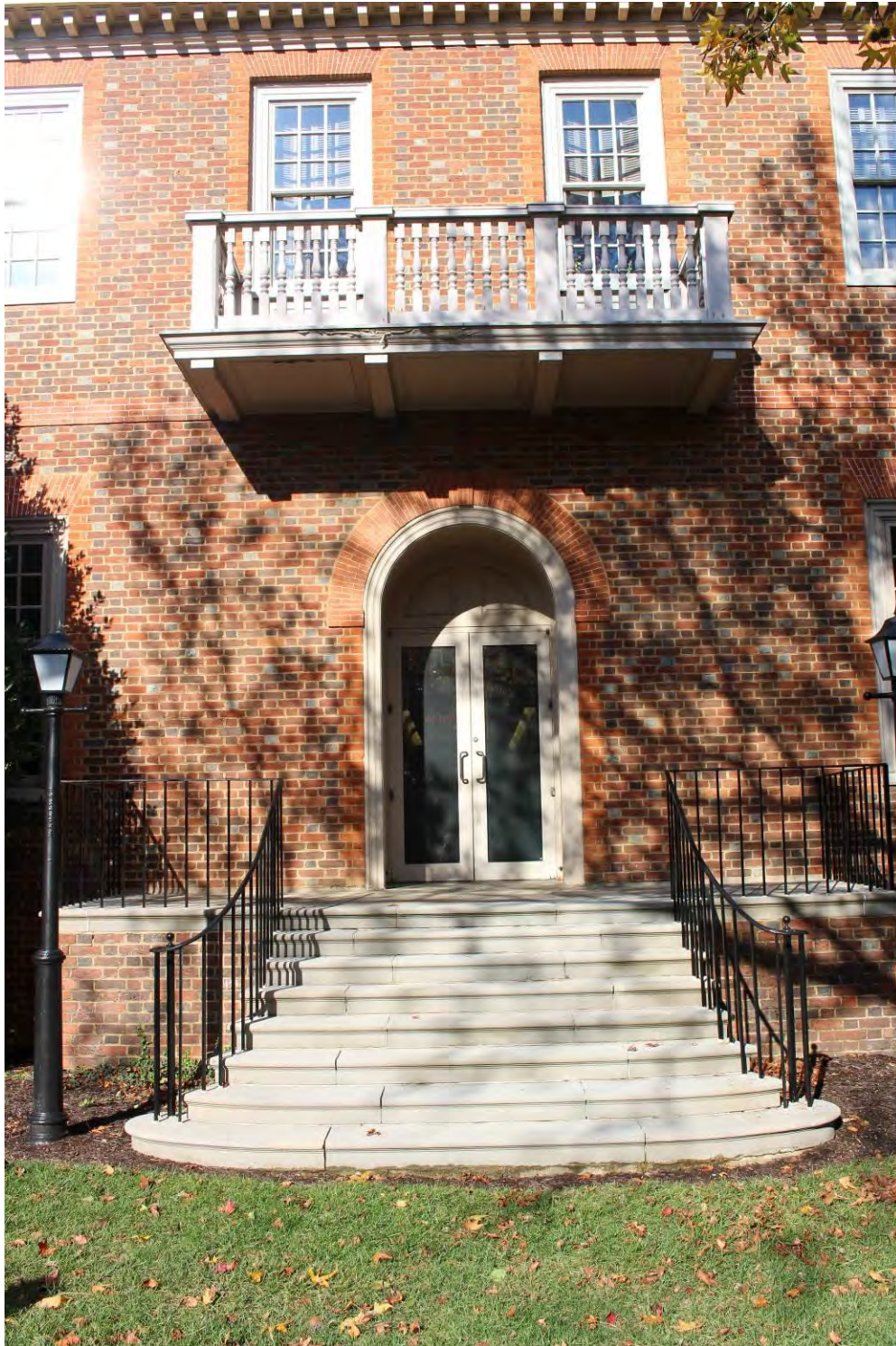
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Photograph 6 of 26: South elevation of south wing, facing northwest.

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Photograph 7 of 26: South elevation entrance, facing north.

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Photograph 8 of 26: South elevation of south wing,
including basement level, facing east.

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Photograph 9 of 26: West elevation of south wing and connection to 1978 addition, facing northeast. This connection and 1978 addition was demolished in 2019.

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Photograph 10 of 26: South elevation of north wing with staircase to basement level,
facing north.

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Photograph 11 of 26: East elevation of north wing, facing west.

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Photograph 12 of 26: North elevation of north wing, facing southwest.

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Photograph 13 of 26: North wing entrance, facing south.

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Photograph 14 of 26: North elevation of north wing, facing southwest.

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Photograph 15 of 26: View from second floor onto north courtyard showing connection between north wing and 1978 addition, facing west. The 1978 addition was demolished in 2019.

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Photograph 16 of 26: View from second floor onto south courtyard showing south and west elevations of original 1950s section, facing northeast.

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Photograph 17 of 26: View from south courtyard showing south elevation of 1950s section, facing northwest.

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Name of Property

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Photograph 18 of 26: Typical window of original 1950s section in south courtyard, facing southeast.

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Photograph 19 of 26: View of flagstone drive, front brick wall, and urn on brick pedestal at base of drive, facing west.

Equitable Life Insurance Building
Name of Property

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Photograph 20 of 26: Molded doorway inside front lobby, facing west.

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Photograph 21 of 26: First floor central elevator bank, facing north.

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Photograph 22 of 26: Typical hallway and office space in north wing, second floor, facing east.

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Photo 23 of 26: View looking east showing west elevation of center block of building (2019)



Photo 24 of 26: View looking east showing west elevation of center block and north end wing of building (2019)

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Photo 25 of 26: View looking east showing west elevation of center block and south end wing of building (2019)



Photo 26 of 26: View looking south from center pavilion to south end wing (2019)



3900



FannieMae

3900



Fannie Mae









































102
ELEVATOR
CLOSET

102

102
ELEVATOR
CLOSET

102
ELEVATOR
CLOSET











National Register of Historic Places
Memo to File

Correspondence

The Correspondence consists of communications from (and possibly to) the nominating authority, notes from the staff of the National Register of Historic Places, and/or other material the National Register of Historic Places received associated with the property.

Correspondence may also include information from other sources, drafts of the nomination, letters of support or objection, memorandums, and ephemera which document the efforts to recognize the property.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Resubmission
Property Name: Equitable Life Insurance Building
Multiple Name:
State & County: DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, District of Columbia

Date Received: 6/12/2019 Date of Pending List: Date of 16th Day: Date of 45th Day: 7/29/2019 Date of Weekly List:

Reference number: RS100002110
Nominator: SHPO

Reason For Review:

Accept Return Reject 7/29/2019 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: The Equitable Life Insurance Building is locally significant and meets National Register Criteria A and C in the area of Commerce and Architecture. Originally completed in 1958 with compatible end wing additions in 1963, the concrete and steel frame, brick clad building is an excellent local example of mid-twentieth century Colonial Revival/Georgian Revival style commercial design. The handsome building by local architect Leon Chatelain Jr. was patterned off of the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg and was seen as a fitting corporate home for an old and respected Washington DC firm. Construction of the office complex marked a period of significant post-war growth and prosperity for insurance firms in general and the local Equitable Life company in particular.

Recommendation/ Criteria: Accept NR Criteria A and C

Reviewer: Paul Lusignan Discipline: Historian

Telephone: (202)354-2229 Date: 07/29/2019

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

8



MEMO

DATE: December 29, 2017
TO: Patrick Andrus
FROM: Kim Williams *KW*
RE: Transmittal Letter for the Equitable Life Insurance Building National Register Nomination

Please find enclosed three disks for the Equitable Life Insurance Building National Register nomination. The enclosed disk, Disk 1 (of 3) contains the true and correct copy of the nomination. The enclosed Disks 2 and 3 contains photographs as per the NR photo requirements.

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: Equitable Life Insurance Building (1956-1975)

Other names/site number: Fannie Mae Headquarters (1975-2016)

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: 3900 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.

City or town: Washington State: D.C. County: --

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B X C D

Returned

<u>DAVID MALONEY / DC SHPO</u>	<u>12/29/2017</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 <u> </u> meets <u> </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

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

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

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

Returned

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>1</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/business

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/business

Returned

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY REVIVALS/Colonial Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: BRICK

Walls: BRICK

Roof: STONE/Slate

Returned

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.)

Summary Paragraph

The building at 3900 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W. was originally built in 1956-1958 as the headquarters of the Equitable Life Insurance Company of Washington, D.C.¹ From 1975 through 2016 it served as the home of the Federal National Mortgage Association. The five-part plan building, which dominates its lot, consists of a main block with two connectors (1956-1958), two side wings (1963) and a non-contributing rear addition connected to both the central block and the wings by hyphens (1978). All three stages of the building were designed in the Georgian style. The contributing portions of the building were designed by local architect Leon Chatelain, Jr. and were modelled on the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg, Virginia (originally built in 1781, reconstructed 1931-1934), a clear reference to the origins of the United States that

¹ Equitable Life Insurance Company of Washington, D.C. is not to be confused with other companies operating under the name Equitable Life Insurance in other parts of the country, which are separate entities. Throughout this document, the company under discussion is the Equitable Life Insurance Company of Washington, D.C. only.

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served to emphasize the longevity of the insurance industry. The contributing main block and the two side wings are characterized by their brick cladding, hipped slate roof, dormer windows, and decorative brickwork and wood trimming. The original design incorporated a landscaped courtyard and a parking area immediately to the rear of the building; today both spaces have been redesigned as formal landscaped courtyards. Additional landscaping, less formal in presentation, separates the 1978 portion of the building from the large parking deck to the rear of the property. 3900 Wisconsin Avenue has undergone minimal changes to primary elevations and appears from the street as it did at the time of construction. While the interior of the building has undergone extensive renovations, the building retains a high level of design integrity on the exterior, as well as its integrity of setting and landscaping.

The building is located in square 1823 on Lot 801. The National Register boundaries include most of this lot to encompass the 1958-63 building and the 1978 rear addition. The boundaries exclude the 1978 structured parking garage at the rear of the building.

Narrative Description

Overall Exterior

The Equitable Life Insurance Building at 3900 Wisconsin Ave is a building of three stories plus a basement level presented in the Colonial Revival style, based on Georgian aesthetic precepts. It consists of three sections: a central block, two side wings, and a rear addition. The central hall and side wings are consistent with Georgian-style five-part massing. The rear addition, from 1978, is noncontributing and will not be described. Constructed of steel framing with concrete slabs, the building is clad with red brick laid in a Flemish bond pattern and featuring glazed headers, rubbed and gauged brick window lintels and corner quoins. The hipped roofs are sheathed with slate shingles.² Soffits exhibit wood moldings with dentil work. The fenestration of the main façade follows a typical symmetric organization. Windows throughout the building are vinyl.

Central Block and Connectors (1958)

The main elevation faces east and fronts Wisconsin Avenue. The central block is five bays wide. The main entrances to the building are located in the three center bays at the level of the first floor. The entrances are reached by a set of eight stone stairs with four metal railings. Each of the three bays has an arched doorway in a brick surround. The double replacement doors are primarily glass and single-light, a departure from the overall Colonial Revival design. They are topped by arched transoms. Above the entrances at the second-floor level is a wood balcony with turned posts.

Window openings on the first and second floors are rectangular and presented in an organized fashion. They have brick surrounds of a redder brick than the primary cladding, which matches

² The original building permit has not been located; however, photographs of the building under construction indicate that the building is steel-framed with concrete floor slabs.

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four courses of brick that visually separate the first and second floors. The openings are fitted with molded vinyl windows that are typically flat-headed, featuring nine-over-twelve lights on the first floor and nine-over-nine lights on the second. On the third floor, window openings are set in hipped dormers that straddle the bays. The dormer window openings are also rectangular, but are of a smaller size than those of the lower stories. The windows are also of vinyl and feature six-over-nine-lights. Where they exist, window openings at the basement level open onto an areaway and are of the same form and size as those on the first and second stories. The basement windows are also vinyl and feature nine-over-nine lights, but do not have brick surrounds.

At the crest of the roof is a wood railing with turned posts and ball finials. Set in the center of the roof is a two-story wood and glass cupola topped by a weathervane. The cupola and railing are surrounded by four red brick chimneys, two to the south and two to the north. On the north and south elevations, which face onto the interior courtyards, the central hall has nine bays. The bay furthest to the east consists of one six-panel double door with a ten-light transom at the first floor and typical windows at the second and third floor. The remainder of the elevations have eight typical windows on the first floor, four elongated twenty-over-twenty light windows with arched headers on the second floor, which originally opened into the building's assembly room, dining room, and kitchen, and four hipped dormer windows on the third floor. The west elevation is dominated by the hyphen connecting to the 1978 addition.

The connectors to the north and south of the central hall are each twelve bays on the east and west elevations. The west elevations face onto the interior courtyards. On the east elevation only, they have typical windows and window openings at the basement level, which are located behind a brick retaining wall. The connectors exhibit typical fenestration on the first and second floors. Each connector has six hipped dormer windows. There are no north or south elevations for the connectors as they meet the central hall and side wings.

Side Wings (1963)

At the north and south ends of the building are the two side wings. Each wing has an overall cruciform shape, with the longer arm running east-west and the shorter running north-south. On the east elevations, the wings each have five bays with typical fenestration and three dormer windows. A projection on either side, which accommodates entrances on the south and north elevations, creates one additional east-elevation bay for each wing. The side wings are constructed of brick laid in Flemish bond with glazed headers that matches the original 1956-1958 construction.

On the north and south elevations in the longer arm of the cross there are ten bays to the west and five bays to the east. They have typical windows and window openings at the basement, first floor, and second floor. There are additionally four dormers above the ten bays to the west and two dormers above the five bays to the east. The east portion of the south elevation of the north wing has a brick stair leading from grade to the basement level. The south elevation of the south wing and the north elevation of the north wing each have an additional four bays in the shorter

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arm of the cross that accommodate side entrances. The first and fourth bays of this section display typical fenestration, while the two center bays vary by wing. On the south elevation, the entrance at the first floor is raised above grade and is reached by a set of stone stairs. The stair has metal side railings and a top landing. Centered on this elevation is an arched and vaulted entryway with raised wood paneling, and a double replacement door recessed into the vaulted opening. Rubbed bricks frame the arched entryway. Above the door opening at the second story is a wooden balcony with turned posts.

On the north elevation, the entrance at the first floor is also reached by a set of stone stairs with metal hand railings; however. The double glass replacement doors are recessed behind an engaged brick surround with a segmentally arched pediment, pilasters and consoles of rubbed and gauged brick. A wooden balcony with an ornate iron railing surmounts this door at the second story level.

The west elevation of both wings consists of four bays with typical window and window openings as well as three typical hipped dormers. A fifth bay that would have originally mirrored the east elevation is now the connecting hyphen to the 1978 addition. At the crest of the roof and in the center of the cross, both wings have wood and glass cupolas.

Interior

A serious fire took place in 1968, causing approximately \$100,000 in damage.³ Beyond repair work that may have been completed by Equitable following the fire, the interior of the building was extensively remodeled in the late 1970s, when Fannie Mae occupied the space. Accordingly, the building retains no integrity on the interior. Directly inside the three front doors is a vestibule, which is connected by the reception area by three arched doorways mirroring the front entrance. The reception area has a curved rear wall with molded panels and door surrounds. The central elevator lobby is reached from the reception area via a set of glass doors. Office and circulation spaces throughout the building are typically carpeted with acoustic tile ceilings.

Site

The site boasts an extensive front lawn. The lawn is separated from the sidewalk by a low brick wall with two openings, each flanked by two stone urns on brick pedestals. The main entrance is reached by a circular drive paved in Belgian block, a feature that dates to the time of the building's construction. The west side of the drive is lined by hedges. To the east of the drive across from the front entrance is a small fountain set on flagstone, which is bordered to the south, east, and north by a hedge trimmed in a box form. The hedge is flanked by two banks of small trees.

³ *Evening Star*, "Damage is Put at \$100,000," January 13, 1966: B1.

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Around the time the side wings were constructed in 1963, the north and south lawns were altered to provide access to the building's new north and south entrances. At the south lawn, a concrete walkway extended to the west from the south entrance's stoop. At the north lawn, an irregularly-shaped circular drive and brick walkway extended from the north access drive to the stoop of the north entrance. Both of these features had been removed from the property by 1977.⁴ Today, larger trees are found to the south and north of the building.

To the rear of the original building are two landscaped courtyards set within the space created by the main building and two side additions. They are bounded to the north by a retaining wall, beyond which is the 1978 addition. New plantings replaced the originals circa 1975 when Fannie Mae purchased the building. The fountain and associated plantings were also installed at that time.

Returned

⁴ John Carl Warnecke, FAIA, Joseph R. Loring & Assoc., Martin & Cagley, Edaw Inc., *Federal National Mortgage Association* (Phase III) (October 1977).

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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.

Returned

Criteria Considerations

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

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

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ARCHITECTURE
COMMERCE
INDUSTRY

Period of Significance
1956-1963

Significant Dates
1956
1963

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Returned

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder
Leon Chatelain, Jr.

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.)

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The Equitable Life Insurance Company of Washington, D.C. was one of the oldest life insurance and mortgage corporations in the District when it engaged Washington architect Leon Chatelain, Jr., to design a new headquarters for their growing company. The building that he designed, which was constructed between 1956 and 1958, is a 20th Century representation of the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg, Virginia, a design choice that both symbolized American heritage and established a direct visual association for the company with American roots. In 1963, Equitable Life constructed two additional wings, also designed by Chatelain, one on each side of the original building. Equitable Life sold the property to the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) in 1975. Fannie Mae constructed a large rear addition in 1978 and occupied the building from 1979 until 2016. The property was sold in November 2016 to NASH – Roadside 3900 Wisconsin, LLC.

The Equitable Life Insurance Building is significant under National Register Criteria A and C. Under Criterion A, it is significant for its association with the massive expansion of the nation's insurance and mortgage business that took place during the mid-twentieth century. The population increase and stable economy following World War II brought with it commercial and organizational growth. The Equitable Life Insurance Company of D.C., like its competitors, sought to establish itself as a sound and prosperous business whose mission was to provide security for the future through mortgages and life insurance. Although neither business was new to the United States, the expansion that occurred mid-century is testimony to the sense of stable government and economy that defines the era.

Under Criterion C, the Equitable Life Insurance Building is significant because it exhibits a high artistic expression of the Georgian Revival Style. It was designed during an era of widespread enthusiasm for an idealized Colonial past when popular aesthetics prized the incorporation of historic design into contemporary structures. It is also one of many buildings that brought the enthusiasm for Colonial Revival to its logical conclusion by replicating the design of prominent buildings of the Colonial period; in this case, the Governor's Mansion in Williamsburg, Virginia. The large size of the building required an exaggeration of the prototype, while the modern use imposed the employment of modern construction methods and materials. This use of historic American architectural design represents the end of an era as new styles, forms, and materials associated with Modernism largely overtook the traditionalist aesthetic that had dominated American architecture during the 20th century.

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

Equitable Life and the Expansion of the Insurance Industry

Insurance has been offered in the United States since 1735, when the first insurance company, the Friendly Society, was established in Charleston, South Carolina. In 1752, Benjamin Franklin was one of the founders of a mutual insurance company, the Philadelphia Contributorship, which is still in operation. The first life insurance company, the Presbyterian Ministers' Fund, was

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established in 1759. Nonetheless, life insurance was not popular through the 1700s and the early 1800s, as it was viewed as a form of gambling. The popularity of insurance began to increase during the mid-1800s and mutual insurers began to proliferate, offering ownership benefits in a mutual company.⁵ The Equitable Life Insurance Company of Washington, D.C. was founded in 1885 by Allen C. Clark, who became the company's first secretary.⁶ In 1902, it was incorporated as a legal reserve company.⁷ Both Equitable Life and the insurance industry in general continued to grow through the 1920s alongside widespread growth in personal income.⁸

In comparison to most industries, insurance—particularly life insurance—was relatively unscathed by the Great Depression. Despite low interest rates and mortgage defaults, only 20 out of 250 life insurance companies went into receivership during the Great Depression.⁹ Moreover, the Great Depression solidified life insurance's reputation as a worthwhile investment. As the *Washington Post* reported, between 1930 and 1935, life insurance companies paid out more than \$16 billion, which significantly alleviated some of the economic distress of the Great Depression.¹⁰ As one of the companies that did not go into receivership, Equitable Life enjoyed consistent success and progress through the 1930s, and in 1934, the company opened a second office in Cleveland.¹¹

Following World War II, the insurance industry entered an age of significant profit and expansion. Between 1945 and 1950, investment of life insurance funds in housing mortgages rose over \$4.5 billion. Life insurance companies held additional large investments in farm mortgages and in industrial and commercial properties for a near \$12.7 billion in investments in July 1950.¹² This figure was more than double the assets of the industry ten years earlier. Equitable Life was even more successful than the insurance industry as a whole: between 1940 and 1950, Equitable Life tripled its assets and, by October 1950, had thirty-two branch offices in six states and the District of Columbia.¹³ The *Washington Post* reported that, in 1955, life insurance companies paid out over \$5 billion in claims, with more than half of that amount paid to living policyholders as annuities or pensions. By 1956, more than 100 million Americans had life insurance policies.¹⁴ Equitable Life was among the beneficiaries of the uptick in life insurance and, in 1953, reported 360 million dollars in insurance in force and over \$8.5 billion in capital and reserves. In 1954, the company announced a 10-for-1 stock split.¹⁵ In 1956 and 1958, the company twice set new records for itself in insurance in force, sales, gross income, and

⁵ Jeremy Hallett, "Life Insurance: An Old Product for a New Time," <https://www.quotacy.com/history-of-life-insurance/> (accessed December 5, 2016).

⁶ *Washington Post*, "Allen C. Clark, Equitable Life Founder, Dead," May 17, 1943: 10.

⁷ *Washington Post*, "Equitable Life is Forced to Expand Offices," November 16, 1934: 28.

⁸ Hallett.

⁹ Hallett.

¹⁰ *Washington Post*, "Life Insurance Called Cushion for Depression," December 6, 1935: 22.

¹¹ *Washington Post*, "Equitable Life is Forced to Expand Offices," November 16, 1934: 28.

¹² *Washington Post*, "Insurance Aids Home Buying," July 30, 1950: R6.

¹³ *Washington Post*, "Equitable Life of D.C. to Vote Hike in Capital," October 26, 1950: B9.

¹⁴ *Washington Post*, "Insurance for Life," September 25, 1956: 12.

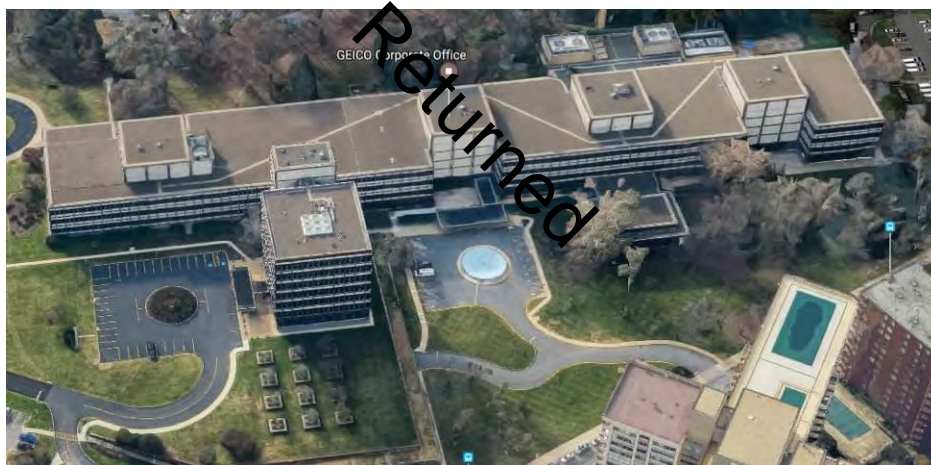
¹⁵ *Washington Post*, "Equitable Life of D.C. Plans 10-for-1 Split," October 14, 1954: 29.

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assets. Additionally, in 1958, Equitable Life held over \$60 million in mortgage loans, with more than \$58 million in the District of Columbia metropolitan area.¹⁶

Equitable Life was not the only Washington insurance operation to experience success during the 1950s, nor the only company where that success manifested as an impressive new headquarters building. Equitable Life's new headquarters was one of three new insurance company headquarters under construction in the D.C. metropolitan area as of 1958. The Government Employees Insurance Co. (GEICO), which had its headquarters at Vermont Avenue and K Street, N.W., constructed its new Modernist headquarters at Western and Willard Avenues in Chevy Chase, Montgomery County.¹⁷ The 276,500 square-foot building, completed in 1959, was designed by Philadelphia architect Vincent G. Kling and cost \$8 million to build. People's Life Insurance also relocated from 1343 H Street, N.W. to a new Stripped Classicist headquarters at New Hampshire Avenue between F and G Streets in Foggy Bottom. Costing \$3 million, the building was designed by prominent local architectural firm Mills, Petticord & Mills and was finished in 1958. At \$2,250,000, Equitable Life's Colonial Revival building was the least expensive of the three. As a group, the three headquarters represented three of the most popular architectural styles of the day.¹⁸



GEICO Headquarters at 5360 Western Ave., Chevy Chase, MD. Photo from Google Maps, 2016.

¹⁶ *Washington Post*, "New Records Set by Equitable Life," March 20, 1957: A23; *Washington Post*, "More Records Set by Equitable Life," March 20, 1958: B14. Though an expansion in the insurance industry occurred nationwide, Equitable Life's operations were concentrated in the Washington, D.C. area and this report limits itself to that scope.

¹⁷ GEICO offered only automobile insurance during this period; however, automobile insurance also enjoyed a significant uptick during the 1950s, in part because of new policy requirements (*Washington Post*, "New DC Law Increases Auto Insurance Sales," January 4, 1956: 46).

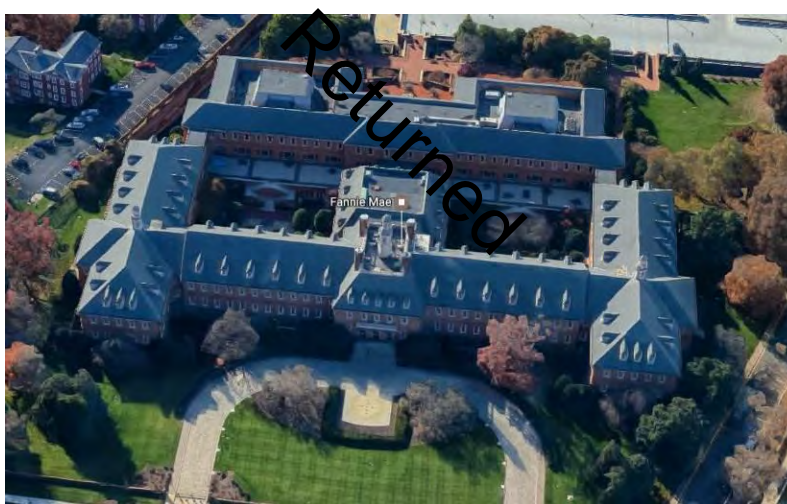
¹⁸ *Evening Star*, "3 DC Insurance Firms Plan New Buildings," June 10, 1958: A16.

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Former People's Life Insurance Headquarters at 601 New Hampshire Ave., N.W. Currently in use as the Embassy of Saudi Arabia. Photo from Google Maps, 2016



Former Equitable Life Insurance Headquarters at 3900 Wisconsin Ave., N.W. Currently Fannie Mae Headquarters. Photo from Google Maps, 2016.

Although Equitable Life Insurance is the only insurance company known to have constructed a Colonial or Georgian Revival headquarters in Washington, insurance companies in other locales also adopted the style. For example, in Richmond, Virginia, both the Home Beneficial Life Insurance Company and the Lawyers Title Insurance Company constructed new Georgian Revival headquarters in the late 1940s to 1950s. Like Equitable Life, the Home Beneficial Life Insurance Company also reported rapid growth during this period, increasing assets by more than seven million dollars in the 1950 alone.¹⁹ Home Beneficial Life Insurance applied for a permit

¹⁹ *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, "Insurance Company Reports Rapid Growth," February 14, 1951: 12.

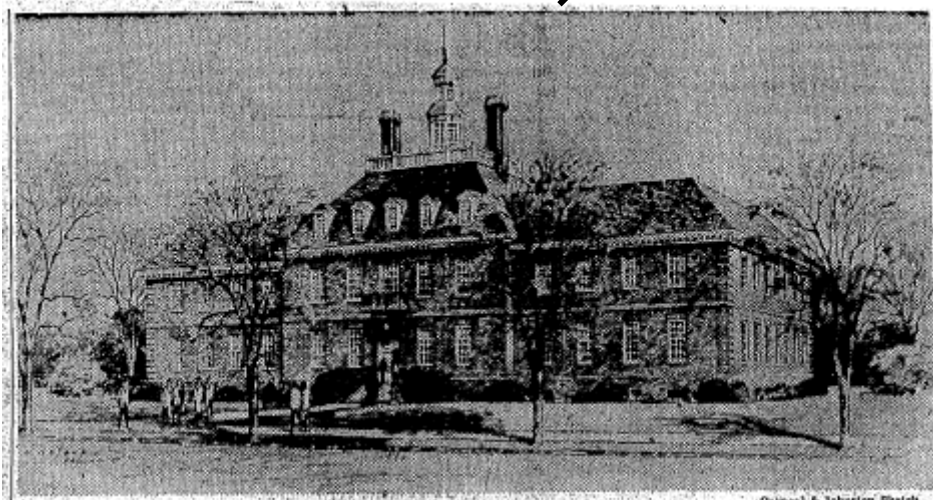
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to construct their new headquarters at 3901 Broad Street in Richmond in September of 1949; the building was projected to cost about \$1.3 million.²⁰ The Lawyers Title Insurance Company, which also enjoyed success during this period, followed in 1958 with the construction of their own Georgian Revival headquarters in Richmond on Cutshaw Avenue between Hamilton Street and Kent Road for \$750,000.²¹ Both structures closely resemble both the Williamsburg Governor's Palace and the Equitable Life Insurance building prior to construction of the 1963 side wings.



Rendering of Design for Home Beneficial Life Insurance Company Headquarters, Richmond, VA. Richmond Times-Dispatch, March 12, 1952: 15.



Rendering of Design for Lawyers Title Insurance Corporation Headquarters in Richmond, VA. Richmond Times-Dispatch, May 27, 1956: 10-B.

²⁰ *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, "Construction Permits Near \$2,000,000," September 7, 1949: 6.
The Home Beneficial Life Insurance Building is currently considered potentially eligible under Criterion C as an outstanding example of Colonial Revival architecture by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

²¹ *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, "Lawyers Title Firm Plans New Building," July 8, 1958: 25.

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Colonial Revival

Colonial Revival refers to architecture that takes its inspiration from buildings erected during the American Colonial period of the 17th and 18th centuries. It encompasses a variety of substyles, including the more formal Georgian Revival, Dutch Revival, Federal Revival, and Southern Colonial. Colonial Revival buildings, like their historic forebears, typically incorporate rectangular forms, flat wall surfaces, gabled or hipped roofs clad in slate or shingle, multi-light windows, and dormers. Where added, wings were typically located on the side of the building, rather than at the front or back.²² Because it is based on styles that were originally popular during the Revolutionary War period, Colonial Revival has come to be viewed as uniquely American and representative of the best of American history. Following a dormant period during the early and mid-nineteenth century, styles inspired by the Colonial period have been consistently popular; accordingly, Colonial Revival is also viewed by many as having timeless appeal.

Colonial Revival began to flourish in the United States beginning in the 1880s. The resurgence in popularity of the Colonial style is believed to have stemmed from the Philadelphia Centennial of 1876, which awoke an interest in rediscovering the colonial roots of the United States and locating a distinctively American style. Another influence was the 1877 tour of New England undertaken by architects McKim, Mead & White, during which they studied and recorded Georgian and Federal houses. The three architects formed their eponymous firm a year later and went on to design several notable Colonial Revival homes, including the Appleton House in Lenox, Massachusetts.²³ Yet another influence was the restoration of Independence Hall in 1898, which returned the building to its appearance at the time of the Revolutionary War.²⁴ Publications such as the *White Pine Series of Architectural Monographs* also contributed to the popularity of Colonial Revival. The *White Pine Series*, issued from 1915 to 1940, documented early American structures through photographs and measured drawings and, at the peak of publication, had over 9,800 architects and designers as subscribers.²⁵

In the initial years of the revival, the Colonial style was usually interpreted loosely, and revival buildings were more heavily ornamented and more irregular in form than their historic counterparts.²⁶ Earlier Colonial Revival structures were most commonly residential. But beginning in the early twentieth century, civic buildings were also frequently built in the Colonial Revival style. The style was particularly popular for town halls during this period,

²² James C. Massey & Shirley Maxwell, "The Formal Revivals: The Colonial and Georgian Styles of the 20th Century," *Old House Journal* (March-April 1991): 51-52.

²³ Historic New England, "Architectural Style Guide: Colonial Revival," <http://www.historicnewengland.org/preservation/your-older-or-historic-home/architectural-style-guide#colonial-revival-1880-1955> (accessed November 30, 2016).

²⁴ National Register of Historic Places, Queens County Savings Bank, Kew Gardens Hills, Queens County, New York, National Register #05000620, section 8, page 5.

²⁵ Northeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association, "The White Pine Monographs," <http://www.nelma.org/library/the-white-pine-monographs/> (accessed May 19, 2017).

²⁶ James C. Massey & Shirley Maxwell, "The Formal Revivals: The Colonial and Georgian Styles of the 20th Century," *Old House Journal* (March-April 1991): 49.

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including the Fairlee Town Hall in Fairlee, Vermont (1913).²⁷ World War I brought an additional surge in the popularity of Colonial Revival as an expression of patriotic sentiment, and housing for war workers during this period was usually designed in this style.²⁸ (Examples of Colonial Revival developments built for war workers include Remington Village and Black Rock Gardens, both located in Bridgeport, Connecticut.²⁹) By this point, Colonial Revival buildings more closely resembled actual buildings of the Colonial period and were more restrained in their ornamentation.³⁰ Colonial Revival remained popular throughout the 1920s, particularly in residential architecture. Interpretations of the style appeared both in the mansions of the wealthy and in the more modest houses of the middle class.³¹

As Colonial Revival's popularity increased, landmark buildings of the Colonial period became models for reproductions and reinterpretations. Two of the most copied were George Washington's Mt. Vernon and Independence Hall of Philadelphia. Several reproductions were constructed for expositions: for example, the 1893 Chicago World's Fair had replicas of both Independence Hall and Mount Vernon, constructed respectively as the Pennsylvania and Virginia State Buildings. Other replicas of Mt. Vernon tended to be residential, and included the Pope-Riddle House now located in Farmington, Connecticut (McKim, Mead & White with Theodate Pope Riddle, 1898-1902). An example of a Mt. Vernon replica constructed for non-residential use was the Rainier Chapter House of the Daughters of the American Revolution in Seattle, Washington (Daniel Riggs Huntington, 1920).³² Independence Hall inspired more commercial copies. An early example of a commercial reproduction of Independence Hall was McKim, Mead & White's design for the Garden City Hotel in Long Island, New York (c.1900, demolished 1973).³³ Another Independence Hall replica was the Live Stock National Bank in Chicago, Illinois, later known as the Stock Yards National Bank (Abraham Epstein, 1925; designated a City of Chicago landmark in 2008).³⁴

Colonial Revival's popularity surged again during the 1930s following the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, which began in the late 1920s. The restoration of Williamsburg was inspired by the fashion for the Colonial style, but it also fueled it: "As a symbol, the restoration

²⁷ National Register of Historic Places, Fairlee Town Hall, Fairlee, Orange County, Vermont, National Register # 14000044, section 7, page 4.

²⁸ William B. Rhoads, "The Colonial Revival and American Nationalism," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Dec., 1976): 239-249.

²⁹ National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form, Wartime Emergency Housing in Bridgeport, 1916-1920, Bridgeport, Fairfax County, Connecticut, National Register #64500081, section F II, page 1.

³⁰ Massey and Maxwell, 49.

³¹ Massey and Maxwell, 50.

³² Daughters of the American Revolution, "Rainier Chapter House," <http://www.dar.org/national-society/historic-sites-and-properties/rainier-chapter-house-0> (accessed April 18, 2017).

³³ National Register of Historic Places, Queens County Savings Bank, Kew Gardens Hills, Queens County, New York, National Register #05000620, section 8, page 6; Garden City Hotel, "Our Hotel," <http://www.gardencityhotel.com/our-hotel/history> (accessed April 13, 2017).

³⁴ *Chicago Tribune*, "A Bid to Save a Piece of the Past," http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2006-05-21/news/0605210248_1_stockyards-bank-building-south-side (accessed April 13, 2017); City of Chicago, "Stock Yards National Bank (Former)," <https://webapps.cityofchicago.org/landmarksweb/web/landmarkdetails.htm?lanId=13087> (accessed April 18, 2017).

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of Colonial Williamsburg and the Colonial National Park was the principal event that helped to promote the colonial revival of the thirties.”³⁵ In addition to several historic colonial buildings, Williamsburg itself became the site of several replica buildings, including the Governor’s Palace and the Capitol. The reconstructions of these buildings were based on the “Bodleian Plate,” an engraved copperplate dating to about 1740 that is the only depiction of the chief buildings of Williamsburg as they originally appeared. It was uncovered in the Bodleian Library at Oxford in 1929, in time to provide guidance for the reconstruction of the buildings as part of the Colonial Williamsburg project.³⁶

Colonial Williamsburg captured the popular imagination almost immediately. Guest registers from prior to World War II indicate that visitors came from every state and many foreign countries. Articles on Williamsburg appeared in a variety of publications. But these appearances were not orchestrated by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (CWF); rather, they were spurred by tremendous public interest.³⁷ The CWF architectural staff soon began to receive requests for plans, specifications, photographs, and paint formulas from across the country. Although there was demand for architectural specifications to erect reproductions of historic Williamsburg buildings, the architectural staff declined to provide them, as they were concerned about promoting the construction of Williamsburg replicas in inappropriate locales and settings.³⁸ The CWF architects were more willing to assist with the design of buildings that incorporated elements of Colonial Williamsburg architecture rather than replications. The most prominent examples were the three Williamsburg inspired houses drawn by CWF architects Perry, Shaw & Hepburn for *House & Garden* in 1937 as part of a series of home designs intended to be made available for purchase to the public. Of the three, only drawings for the first were ever completed and sold. The design borrowed details from Williamsburg buildings the Pitt house, the Travis house, the Market Square Kitchen, the Market Square Tavern, and the Robert Carter House.³⁹

As part of the renewed interest in Colonial Revival generated by Williamsburg, the style became increasingly popular for commercial properties. Larger commercial buildings tended to reinterpret mid-eighteenth-century Georgian buildings, while smaller buildings interpreted a wider range of colonial styles.⁴⁰ Automobile-oriented architecture, such as service stations, motels, and restaurants, was often built in the Colonial Revival style during this period.⁴¹ Mt. Vernon in particular inspired a number of copies across the country in the form of motels,

³⁵ David Gebhard, “The American Colonial Revival in the 1930s,” *Winterthur Portfolio* Vol 22, No 2/3 (Summer-Autumn, 1987): 117.

³⁶ George Humphrey Yetter, *Williamsburg Before and After: The Rebirth of Virginia’s Colonial Capitol* (Williamsburg, Virginia: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1988), 66.

³⁷ Thomas J. Taylor, “The Williamsburg Restoration and Its Reception by the American Public: 1926-1942” (PhD diss., George Washington University, 1989), 4-5.

³⁸ Taylor, 216-218.

³⁹ Taylor, 269-272.

⁴⁰ Gebhard, 141.

⁴¹ Gebhard, 141-142.

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marked by red, hipped roofs; balustrades; and cupolas.⁴² Colonial-inspired office and retail buildings also began to appear, such as the Music Corporation of America Building in Beverly Hills, California, a recreation of a Georgian mansion set in a colonial garden (Paul R. Williams, 1938; recipient of the AIA Award of Merit, Southern California Chapter, 1939).⁴³ The style also continued to be used for civic buildings, including the Delaware Legislative Hall (E. William Martin, 1931-1933).⁴⁴ It was popular for post offices, town halls, churches, and educational buildings, connecting Colonial Revival to civic life and tradition. In the style of historic Colonial civic buildings, these buildings often incorporated side wings and central cupolas.⁴⁵

Beginning in the 1940s, Colonial Revival's popularity began to wane as the popularity of Modernist architecture rose. However, Colonial Revival never completely departed from the architecture scene, remaining more popular in residential architecture but making occasional appearances in commercial buildings. From about 1945 to 1960, the style was especially popular for churches, since, according to Dale Dowling, the style communicated "a sense of peace, simplicity, and honesty" to families that had lived through the war period.⁴⁶ Since 1950, the style has remained "continuously popular but never dominant."⁴⁷ In spite of Colonial Revival's diminished popularity, replica buildings continued to appear occasionally in the architectural landscape. One fine example is the Queens County Savings Bank in Kew Gardens Hills, Queens County, New York, which was based on Independence Hall (Harold O. Carlson, 1953-1954; listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2005). At the bank's dedication ceremony, its president, Joseph Upton, characterized Independence Hall and, by extension, the new bank building as "symbolic of the freedom and character of the American people to progress and grow," utilizing the idealized past as a public relations strategy.⁴⁸ Another later example is the Bank of Monticello in Monticello, Georgia, constructed in 1963 and modelled on Thomas Jefferson's Monticello.⁴⁹ A residential replica of Monticello, "Whitecello" in Chatham, Virginia, was also constructed in 1959 for Joseph Whitehead, Jr. as a residence.⁵⁰

The Colonial Revival Style in Washington, D.C.

The Colonial Revival style historically has been quite popular in Washington, D.C. and the surrounding area. Pamela Scott suggests that this popularity is connected in part to nostalgia for

⁴² Pogue.

⁴³ Paul R. Williams Project, "MCA/Litton Industries, Beverly Hills, CA,"

<http://www.paulrwilliamsproject.org/gallery/1930s-office-buildings/> (accessed April 18, 2017).

⁴⁴ Susan W. Thrane and Tom Patterson, *State Houses: America's 50 State Capitol Buildings* (Erin, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 2005), 259.

⁴⁵ Gebhard, 141-142.

⁴⁶ Dale Dowling, "For God, for Family, For Country: Colonial Revival Church Buildings in the Cold War Era" (PhD diss., George Washington University, 2004), xi, 30.

⁴⁷ Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 489

⁴⁸ National Register of Historic Places, Queens County Savings Bank, Kew Gardens Hills, Queens County, New York, National Register #05000620, section 8, page 3.

⁴⁹ Bank of Monticello, "About Us," <http://www.bankofmonticello.com/aboutus.htm> (accessed April 18, 2017).

⁵⁰ Henry H. Mitchell, "Founding Father Flattery," <http://www.victorianvilla.com/sims-mitchell/local/foundingfatherflattery.htm> (accessed April 18, 2017).

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the Revolutionary era and the founders of the District of Columbia—including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison—and in part to an especially strong affinity felt by residents, especially government employees, for “American values” associated with Colonial architecture and embodied in the Colonial Revival style. The popularity of Colonial Revival has also been informed by D.C.’s location in the mid-Atlantic region, near many examples of original Colonial-era buildings.⁵¹

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Colonial and Georgian Revival styles were popular for large, single-family residences, including Causeway (now Tregaron) (1912) and the White-Meyer House (1912-1913). Beginning in the early twentieth century, Colonial and Georgian Revival style architecture benefitted from the endorsement of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and became the standard for municipal architecture in the District of Columbia. In 1911, the Commission suggested that Georgian Revival was the most suitable style for public school buildings within the District, preferring it over Elizabethan Revival or Victorian styles.⁵² This position influenced the design of many school buildings within the District of Columbia built from the 1910s through the 1930s, including the Miner Teachers College (Leon Dessez, 1914), and Woodrow Wilson High School (Albert Harris, 1935).⁵³ Other municipal buildings were also constructed in the Colonial Revival style, including the Banneker Recreation Center at 2500 Georgia Ave., N.W. (1934). Colonial and Georgian Revival were also employed for hospital and institutional buildings, including the Walter Reed General Hospital (1908, additions 1914-1992), which, like 3900 Wisconsin Avenue, has a grand front drive.⁵⁴ Two more examples of institutional use are King Hall (1916) and the mess hall (1920) at the Armed Forces Retirement Home, both contributing structures to the Armed Forces Retirement Home National Register Historic District.⁵⁵

During the 1930s and 1940s, many residential developments in D.C. were constructed in the Colonial Revival style. These included developments of single-family homes, like Colonial Village, begun in 1931, which eventually included eighty houses based on Colonial-era structures such as George Washington’s boyhood home.⁵⁶ Another example is Colony Hill, a

⁵¹ Pamela Scott, “Residential Architecture of Washington, D.C., and Its Suburbs,” <https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/adecenter/essays/Scott.html> (accessed May 16, 2017).

⁵² Sue A. Kohler, *The Commission of Fine Arts, a Brief History, 1910-1995* (Washington, D.C.: Commission of Fine Arts, 1996), 43.

⁵³ Kimberly Prothro Williams, “Schools for All – A History of DC Public School Buildings 1804-1960” [Brochure] (Washington, D.C.: D.C. Preservation League, 2008), 15-18.

⁵⁴ D.C. Office of Planning, Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC) Historic District Nomination, <https://planning.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/op/publication/attachments/Walter%20Reed%20FINAL%20NOM%20SIGNED%20BY%20KEEPER.pdf> (accessed May 19, 2017).

Additional Colonial and Georgian Revival buildings are found within the Walter Reed Historic District, with dates of construction ranging from 1910 to 1954.

⁵⁵ National Register of Historic Places, Armed Forces Retirement Home, Washington, D.C., National Register #07001237, section 7, pages 41 and 48.

⁵⁶ Marvin Caplan and Ralph Blessing, “Shepherd Park,” in *Washington At Home*, ed. Kathryn Schneider Smith (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 455.

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collection of forty-three houses built by developers Boss and Phelps (1931).⁵⁷ Also constructed were several apartment developments, including McLean Gardens immediately to the south of 3900 Wisconsin Avenue, NW (1942).

As elsewhere in the United States, fewer Colonial or Georgian Revival style buildings were built in D.C. during the 1950s and later. Although the Colonial Revival style remained popular in some of the D.C. area's residential neighborhoods dating to the 1950s and later—for example, the Fox Hill subdivision in Potomac, Maryland, which was built in the 1960s—the Equitable Life Insurance Building represents one of the last large-scale buildings in Washington DC designed in the Colonial or Georgian Revival styles.

Among the D.C. designers that favored the Colonial Revival was Arthur B. Heaton, who designed many single-family homes based on mid-Atlantic, brick, colonial houses, including his own home, “Wendover,” in Spring Valley (1929).⁵⁸ Another was Albert L. Harris, who began his career with Hornblower and Marshall, and later served as Municipal Architect from 1921-1933. Harris designed a variety of Colonial Revival municipal buildings for the District of Columbia, including Woodrow Wilson High School, introduced above. Together, Harris and Heaton designed the Colonial Revival style Corcoran Hall on the campus of George Washington University.⁵⁹ Washington, D.C.'s mail-order house design business, Standard Homes Company, produced a variety of low-to-medium cost designs for single-family homes, most of which were Colonial Revival.⁶⁰

Architect – Leon Chatelain, Jr.

Leon Chatelain, Jr. was one of Washington's most celebrated mid-20th century architects. Known for his skill with working with traditional architectural styles, his *Washington Post* obituary names the Equitable Life Insurance Headquarters among his five most notable buildings. The others included were the Kiplinger Building, the Westmoreland Congregational Church, the Washington Gas Light Company headquarters, and the Suffridge Building. His firm was responsible for numerous other bank and office buildings, several C&P Telephone Buildings, as well as a variety of residential projects.⁶¹

Born in Washington, DC, in 1902, Chatelain, Jr. attended George Washington University before working for Waddy Butler Wood, a noted Washington architect. Despite not having a professional architectural degree, Chatelain became a registered architect under the laws of the

⁵⁷ Bridget Hall, “Historic Touches Help Colony Hill Hold Fast to Past,” *Washington Post*, September 6, 1997, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/real-estate/1997/09/06/historic-touches-help-colony-hill-hold-fast-to-past/27e59a3c-9666-45dd-88cc-8ac9f9bdfce2/?utm_term=.99cfa3ab9547 (accessed May 15, 2017).

⁵⁸ Pamela Scott, “Residential Architecture of Washington, D.C., and Its Suburbs,” <https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/adecenter/essays/Scott.html> (accessed May 16, 2017).

⁵⁹ National Register of Historic Places, Corcoran Hall, Washington, District of Columbia, National Register #90001545.

⁶⁰ Pamela Scott, “Residential Architecture of Washington, D.C., and Its Suburbs,” <https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/adecenter/essays/Scott.html> (accessed May 16, 2017).

⁶¹ *Washington Post*, “Noted District Architect Leon Chatelain Jr. Dies” May 8, 1979: C6.

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District of Columbia. He began his own practice in 1930 when Wood's firm became unable to pay its employees. His rationale for starting his own firm at such a low point economically was that he could work for free for someone else or he could work for free for himself, and working for himself sounded like a better idea.⁶² In March and April 1935 he wrote six columns in *The Washington Post* on the merits of using architects for residential projects, promoting his profession if not his personal services. In 1956 he formed the architectural firm of Chatelain, Gauger & Nolan.⁶³ In 1970, he formed a new firm, Chatelain, Samperton & Nolan before retiring in 1974.⁶⁴

Chatelain, Jr.'s 10-story Kiplinger Building (1729 H Street, N.W.) was designed in 1949 in the Stripped Classical style. It is listed as an individual landmark in the DC Inventory and in the National Register of Historic Places. The Washington Gas Light Company Headquarters at 11th and H Streets, NW. was designed in 1940 by Chatelain, Jr. and Jarrett C. White and retains the features that define it as an example of Art Moderne. The Suffridge Building at 1775 K Street, N.W., constructed in 1970, represented a distinct change in style from Chatelain, Jr.'s earlier work. Its late Modernism appearance is likely the product of his partners in Chatelain, Samperton & Nolan.

Chatelain's fame, however, was equally garnered by his contribution to the architectural profession. He held a variety of leadership positions, including president of the Washington Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, founder and president of the Washington Building Congress, chairman of the National Commission on the Architectural Barriers to the Handicapped, and a member of the President's Commission on Employing the Handicapped, culminating in his election as the national president of the American Institute of Architects in 1956. His civic contribution extended beyond the architectural profession, as he served as president of the Washington Board of Trade (1948), the Kiwanis Club, and the Metropolitan Police Boys Club, among numerous other organizations.⁶⁵ Chatelain was also an AIA Fellow, an Honorary Member of the RIBA, RAIC Honorary Fellow, Honorary Fellow of the Philippine Institute of Architects, and received the French Medal of the Conseil Supérieur. He died in 1977 at the age of 75.⁶⁶

3900 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.

Prior to 1907, the land at 3900 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W. belonged to Richard H. Goldsborough, a real estate developer, in partnership with F.C. and C.W. Garnett.⁶⁷ It was adjacent to the seventy-five-acre estate of newspaperman John Roll McLean, who hired architect John Russell Pope to design a Georgian Revival mansion for his property, which McLean named

⁶² Leon Chatelain Jr., interview by Emily Hotaling Eig, 1975.

⁶³ Leon Chatelain Jr., interview by Emily Hotaling Eig, 1975.

⁶⁴ *Washington Post*, "Noted District Architect Leon Chatelain Jr. Dies" May 8, 1979: C6.

⁶⁵ *Washington Post*, "Noted District Architect Leon Chatelain Jr. Dies" May 8, 1979: C6.

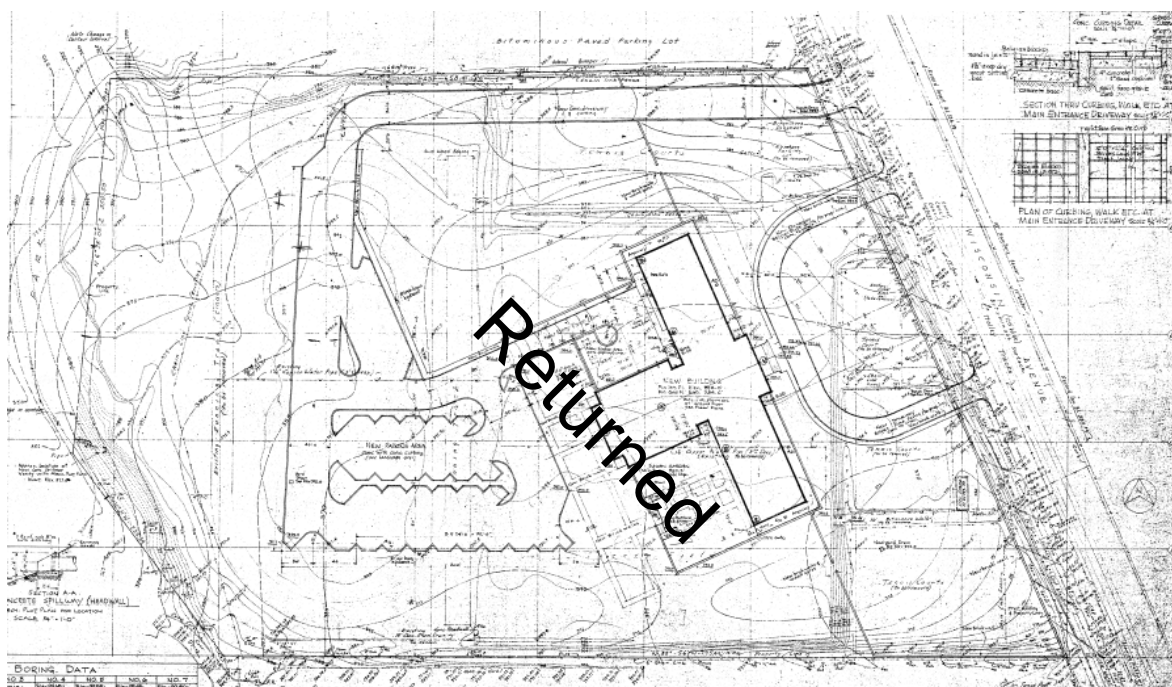
⁶⁶ *Washington Post*, "Noted District Architect Leon Chatelain Jr. Dies," May 8, 1979: C6.

⁶⁷ G.W. Baist, *Baist's Real Estate Atlas of Surveys of Washington, District of Columbia: Complete in Four Volumes* (Philadelphia: G.W. Baist, 1907), Vol. 3, Plate 29; William H. Boyd, *Boyd's Directory of the District of Columbia* (Washington, D.C.: William H. Boyd, 1899), 479

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“Friendship.” McLean’s home, demolished in 1942, may have influenced the decision of Equitable Life to design their headquarters in the Georgian Revival style.⁶⁸ By 1909, Goldborough and the Garnetts had sold the future Equitable Life property to Christian Heurich, owner of the eponymous local brewery that operated between 1872 and 1956.⁶⁹ Historic maps indicate that, between 1925 and 1931, Heurich sold the property to Thomas Sidwell, founder of the Sidwell Friends School.⁷⁰ Sidwell Friends had been located at 3901 Wisconsin Avenue, across the street from the future 3900 Wisconsin Avenue, since 1911.⁷¹ Sidwell later sold the property back to Heurich between 1937 and 1945.⁷² However, Sidwell Friends continued to use the land as an athletic field.⁷³



Selection from 1956 Plot Plan for 3900 Wisconsin Avenue (received from Fannie Mae)

⁶⁸ McLean Gardens, “History,”

http://www.mcleangardens.com/sub_category_list.asp?category=20&title=History (accessed April 25, 2017).

⁶⁹ G.W. Baist, *Baist’s Real Estate Atlas of Surveys of Washington, District of Columbia: Complete in Four Volumes* (Philadelphia: G.W. Baist, 1909), Vol. 3, Plate 29; Mark Benbow, “Christian Heurich (1842-1945),” *Immigrant Entrepreneurship*, <http://immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entry.php?rec=38> (accessed December 15, 2016).

⁷⁰ G.W. Baist, *Baist’s Real Estate Atlas of Surveys of Washington, District of Columbia: Complete in Four Volumes* (Philadelphia: G.W. Baist, 1925), Vol. 3, Plate 29; G.W. Baist, *Baist’s Real Estate Atlas of Surveys of Washington, District of Columbia: Complete in Four Volumes* (Philadelphia: G.W. Baist, 1931), Vol. 3, Plate 29.

⁷¹ Sidwell Friends School, “History,” [http://www.sidwell.edu/\(X\(1\)S\(2dho5wrxvajnvu3rkb1xss45\)\)/about_sfs/history/index.aspx](http://www.sidwell.edu/(X(1)S(2dho5wrxvajnvu3rkb1xss45))/about_sfs/history/index.aspx) (accessed December 15, 2016).

⁷² G.W. Baist, *Baist’s Real Estate Atlas of Surveys of Washington, District of Columbia: Complete in Four Volumes* (Philadelphia: G.W. Baist, 1937), Vol. 3, Plate 29; G.W. Baist, *Baist’s Real Estate Atlas of Surveys of Washington, District of Columbia: Complete in Four Volumes* (Philadelphia: G.W. Baist, 1945), Vol. 3, Plate 29

⁷³ *Evening Star*, “Doggy Demonstration,” October 7, 1956: 169.

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Equitable Life purchased the property from Heurich and began construction on its new headquarters in 1956. The builder was Joseph Nebel Co. and the architect was Leon Chatelain, Jr. of Chatelain, Gauger & Nolan. Chatelain was chosen as the architect in part because of his position on the board of directors for Equitable Life.⁷⁴ The building was designed and constructed with the expectation that more space might be needed in the future and that additions would then be added.⁷⁵ A 1957 article in the *Evening Star* indicates that, despite its Georgian Revival style exterior, the Equitable Life building has a steel frame.⁷⁶ The original design for the site included what is now the central portion of the building as well as the front driveway, which was paved in Belgian block, and its adjacent sidewalk, which was paved in brick. It also included the low brick wall that currently separates the property from the street.⁷⁷



The Governor's Palace in Colonial Williamsburg (Wikimedia Commons)

While significantly larger overall, the Equitable Life building takes clear cues from the Governor's Palace of Williamsburg, Virginia. The similarities between the two buildings are

⁷⁴ Leon Chatelain III, interview by Kendra Parzen and Emily Eig, May 2017.

⁷⁵ Equitable Life Insurance Company of Washington, "New Home Office of the Equitable Life Insurance Company" [Pamphlet], courtesy of Leon Chatelain III.

Although it was never built, a 1953 zoning study by Chatelain, Gauger & Nolan also explored the possibility of building a large block of apartments at the west end of the lot (study courtesy of Leon Chatelain III).

⁷⁶ *Evening Star*, "Home for Insurance Firm Rises," June 22, 1957: 26.

⁷⁷ Chatelain, Gauger & Nolan, *The Home Office Building for Equitable Life Insurance Company* [Drawing Set], August 22, 1956, page A1.

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meticulous and deliberate: in preparation for the design, Chatelain sent employees of his firm to Williamsburg to measure the Governor's Palace.⁷⁸ The central portion of the Equitable Life building and the Governor's Palace are each five bays wide and two and a half stories tall at the front. Atop the roof, each building has a white, wood balustrade and a central, two-story, wood cupola. Each building also has large brick chimneys to either side, although the larger Equitable Life building has four, while the Governor's Palace has two. Like the Governor's Palace, the Equitable Life building is clad in brick laid in a Flemish bond. On both buildings, a redder brick is used for window headers and surrounds and as a string course visually separating the first and second floors. Both buildings have a steeply-pitched slate roof and hipped dormers, as well as a molded wood cornice with small dentils, painted white. The Equitable Life building's large side wings correlate in placement to the two secondary buildings of the Governor's Palace property. However, the Equitable Life building also departs from Governor's Palace in some notable instances. For example, where the side wings of the Governor's Palace have no openings facing the front, both of the Equitable Life building's wings have forward-facing fenestration. The side wings of the Equitable Life building are also set further back in relation to the main block than those at the Governor's Palace, with the result that they do not obscure the main block when viewed from the side.



Rendering of the Equitable Life Insurance Company by Leon Chatelain (Courtesy of Leon Chatelain III)

⁷⁸ Leon Chatelain III, interview by Kendra Parzen and Emily Eig, May 2017.

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Equitable Life Headquarters before construction of the side wings, c.1958-1962 (Courtesy of Leon Chatelain III)

The building dedication for the Equitable Life Insurance Building was held on November 6, 1958 and attracted a crowd of more than five hundred business and civic leaders.⁷⁹ A pamphlet on the new headquarters produced by Equitable Life noted that the company desired “architecture that would be satisfying and attractive during the entire life of the building.” Williamsburg was chosen as the inspiration because it was “part of our finest heritage” and because its designs were eminently suitable for the Tidewater region. The pamphlet highlighted the extreme care that was taken to marry the atmosphere of Colonial Virginia with the needs of a modern office building, including using handmade and wood-fired brick to replicate as closely as possible the appearance of a Colonial building.⁸⁰ In an interview given in 1962, Equitable Life Insurance president Charles E. Phillips relayed that he had waited twenty years to purchase the right site for his company’s building. He chose the Colonial Revival style to better fit into the surrounding residential neighborhood and because he felt colonial buildings “had held up well, would be timeless, and reflect the old roots of the insurance business.” The unnamed interviewer noted that the building was a reproduction of the Governor’s Palace in Williamsburg and reported that the spacious lobby was lit by electric candelabra chandeliers.⁸¹

⁷⁹ *Evening Star*, “Equitable Life Dedicates New Home Office” November 7, 1958: 25.

⁸⁰ Equitable Life Insurance Company of Washington, “New Home Office of the Equitable Life Insurance Company” [Pamphlet], courtesy of Leon Chatelain III.

⁸¹ *Evening Star*, “New Trade Board Head Wants ‘Right’ Industries,” May 24, 1962: A19.

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In 1959, the building's landscaping received an award from the American Association of Nurserymen for excellence in industrial landscaping work, which recognized it as among the top ten industrial landscaping projects of the year nationwide. The award-winning design by landscape architect Boris Timochenko was executed by A. Gude Sons Co., Inc. of Rockville, MD.⁸²

On March 2, 1963, the *Evening Star* reported that Equitable Life Insurance had been granted a permit to erect a four-story addition at a cost of \$900,000. The addition would also be designed by Leon Chatelain's firm of Chatelain, Gauger & Nolan.⁸³ At the time of the construction of the original building, extra brick had been created in anticipation of future additions; thus, Chatelain could exactly match the brick of the new additions to the brick of the original building.⁸⁴



The Equitable Life Insurance Building after construction of the side wings (Courtesy of Leon Chatelain III)

⁸² *Evening Star*, "Firms Win Awards for Planning," November 14, 1959: B5.

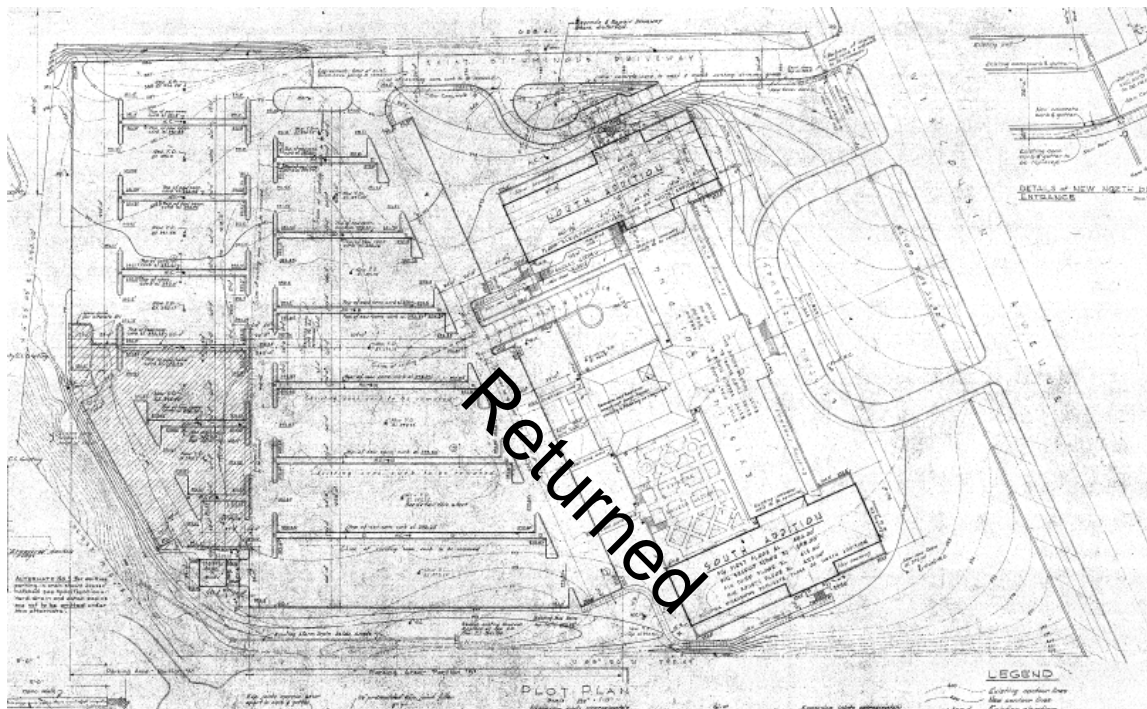
⁸³ *Evening Star*, "District Building Permits," March 3, 1963: 25

⁸⁴ Leon Chatelain III, interview by Kendra Parzen and Emily Eig, May 2017.

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While the front lawn was not altered, a drop-off drive was added to reach the side entrance in the building's new north wing and a walk was added on the south side of the property connecting the south wing entrance to the parking area.⁸⁵ In 1964, craftsman Atlee Whiteleather of William F. Negson, Inc., received an award commending the intricate detail of the exterior brickwork of the addition.⁸⁶ In January 1968, the building was the site of a major fire, which began in a storeroom in the south wing. Damage from the fire spread throughout the building, and repairs were estimated at \$100,000.⁸⁷



1963 Plot Plan by Chatelain, Gauger & Nolan (received from Fannie Mae)

In 1971, Equitable Life Insurance announced that they intended to build a \$46 million complex of offices and shops on the property, tearing down the existing Colonial Revival office building to make way for five new buildings.⁸⁸ However, the project was never realized. Instead, the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) purchased the property from Equitable Life in 1975 for \$13 million.⁸⁹ Although Fannie Mae intended to move into the building in 1977, renovations took longer than the projected six months.⁹⁰ Fannie Mae spent a total of \$37

⁸⁵ Chatelain, Gauger & Nolan, *Additions and Alterations to the Home Office Building for Equitable Life Insurance Company, 3900 Wisconsin Ave., N.W., Washington, DC* [Drawing Set], August 17, 1962.

⁸⁶ *Evening Star*, "Awards Set for Craftsmen," July 10, 1964: 70.

⁸⁷ *Evening Star*, "Damage is Put at \$100,000," January 13, 1966: B1.

⁸⁸ *Washington Post*, "Insurance Firm Plans Big Complex," September 24, 1971: C1.

⁸⁹ *Washington Post*, "Area Headquarters Bought by FNMA," November 5, 1975: B7.

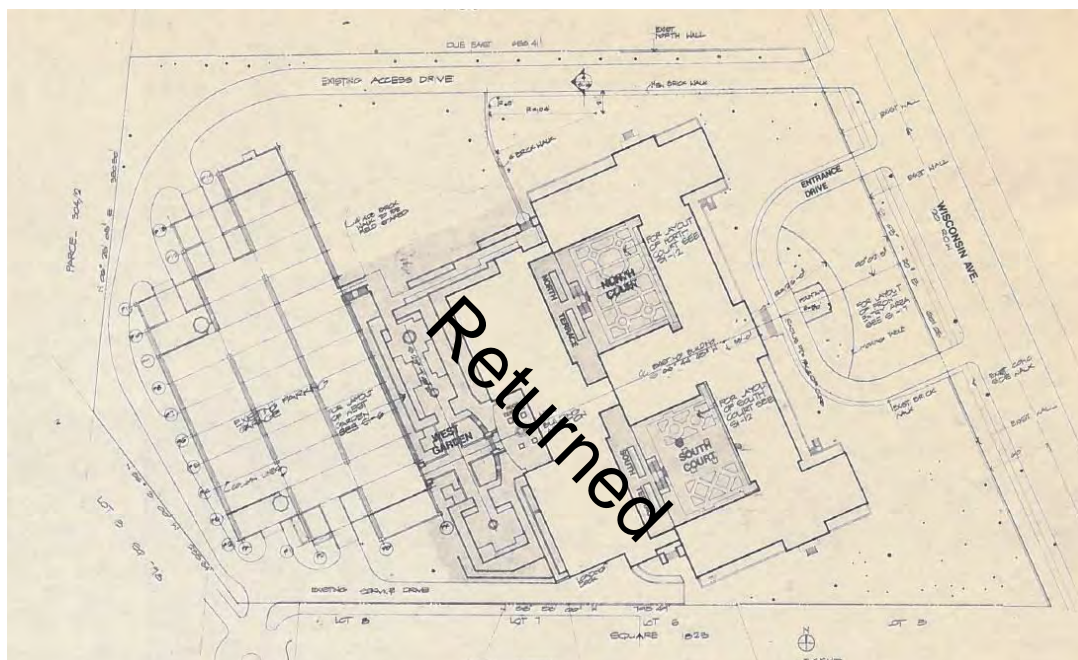
It is not known why Fannie Mae decided to retain the existing building rather than demolish and build a new headquarters.

⁹⁰ *Evening Star*, No Title, November 1, 1975: 20.

Equitable Life Insurance Building
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million relocating its headquarters to the building from a downtown office building, including the addition of the rear wing, designed by John Carl Warnecke & Associates to be compatible with the existing building. When Fannie Mae occupied the renovated building in 1979, there were 560 employees working on eleven floors.⁹¹ As part of the changes, Fannie Mae added the fountain that currently sits in front of the building at the top of the circular drive and re-landscaped the courtyards.⁹² Meanwhile, Equitable Life formed Equitable General as a Virginia corporation and holding company in 1974 so that it could expand into new businesses outside the insurance field; in 1978, Equitable General merged with Great Southern Life Insurance Corp. of Houston.⁹³



1977 Site Plan by John Carl Warnecke Architects (received from Fannie Mae)

⁹¹ *Washington Post*, "Fannie Mae Moves to Colonial-Style Site," June 19, 1979: D7.

⁹² John Carl Warnecke Architects, *Federal National Mortgage Association: Home Office, 3900 Wisconsin Avenue Northwest, Washington, D.C. 20016* [Drawing Set], October 1977.

⁹³ Jerry Knight, "Area Firm Attacked on Stock Deal: 3 Stockholders Attack Equitable General Board," *Washington Post*: D7; Jerry Knight, "Equitable General to Merge with Great Southern Corp.," *Washington Post*, April 15, 1978: D8.

Equitable Life Insurance Building
Name of Property

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

*Final acreage and latitude/longitude to be added pending DC HPRB review of proposed
boundaries, described below and in attached plat. Final boundaries will be subject to formal
survey.*

Acreage of Property _____

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Equitable Life Insurance Building
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Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

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

- 1. Latitude: 38.94045 Longitude: -77.07715
- 2. Latitude: Longitude:
- 3. Latitude: Longitude:
- 4. Latitude: Longitude:

**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:

Returned

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

The building is located on part of Lot 801 in square 1823. From a point forming the southeast corner of Lot 801, the boundaries extend north along the property line that parallels Wisconsin Avenue, NW to a point approximately fifty-nine feet north of the north end of the building, then west to a point marking the rear wall of the 1978 addition to the building, then due south to the southern edge of the lot line of Lot 801, then westerly back to the starting point, according to the boundary map included in this nomination.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries encompass the main block and end wings of the historic building, constructed 1956-1963 along with the 1978 rear addition and the front drive and landscaped yard. The 1978 structured parking lot is excluded from the boundaries.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Kendra Parzen, Historic Preservation Specialist, and Emily Eig, President
organization: EHT Traceries, Inc.
street & number: 440 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
city or town: Washington state: DC zip code: 20003
e-mail kendra.parzen@traceries.com
telephone: (202)393-1199
date: 8/14/2017

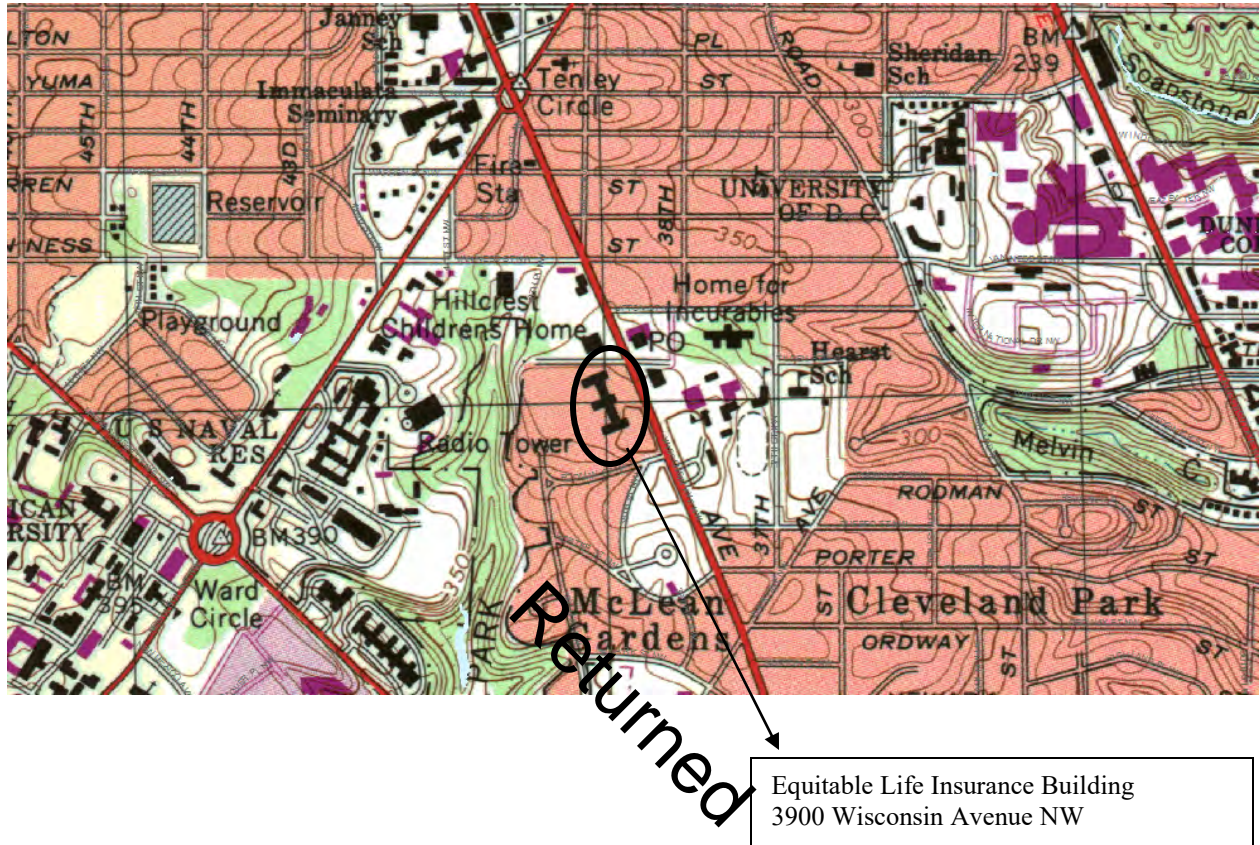
Additional Documentation

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.)

Equitable Life Insurance Building
Name of Property

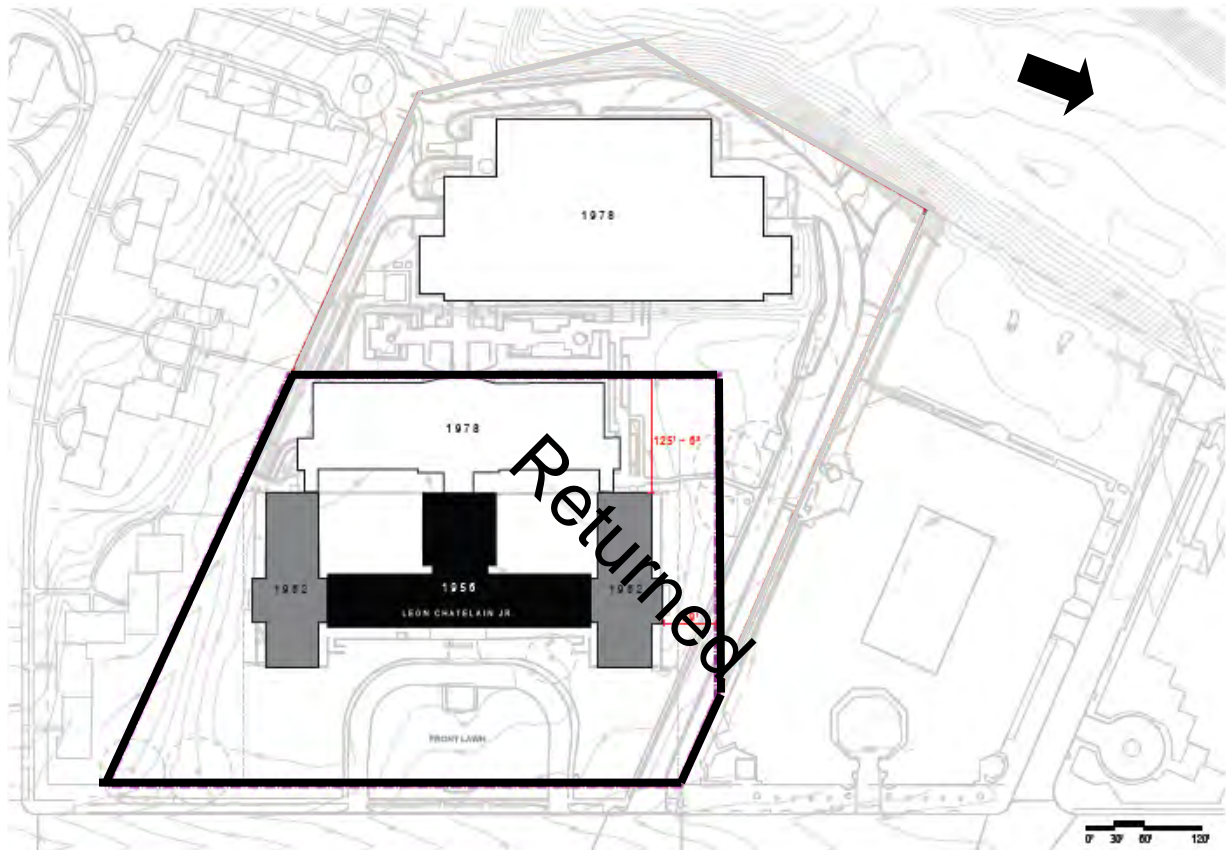
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Site Map
(USGS Map 7.5 Series 2016 – Washington West)

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Map Showing National Register Boundaries

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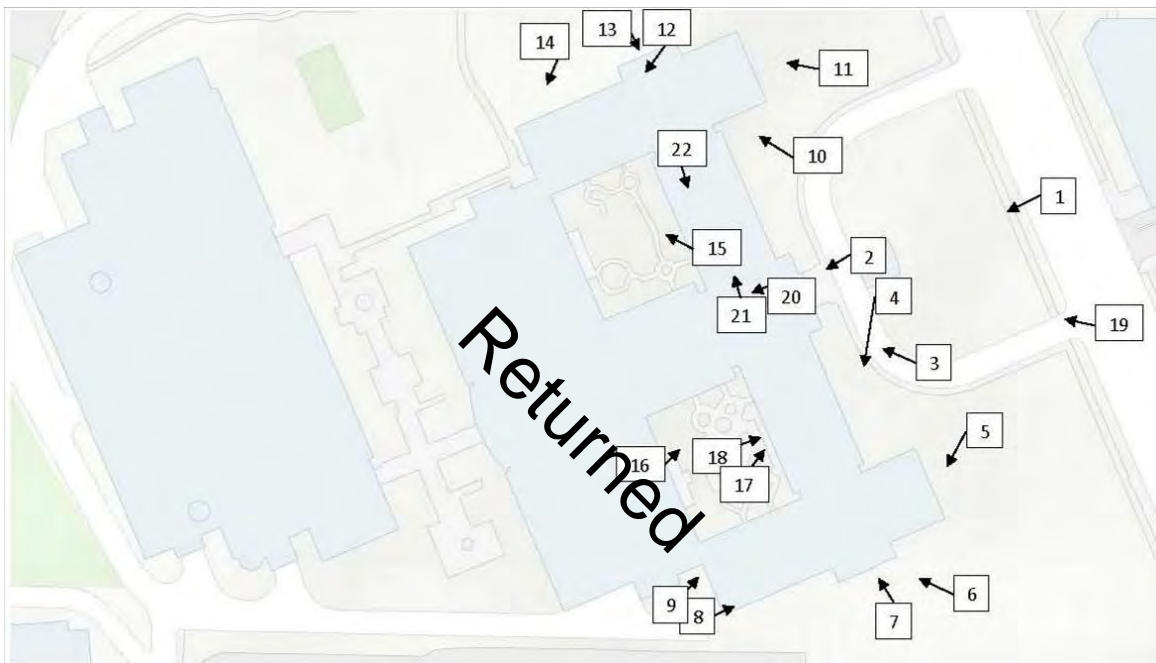
Returned

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Photographs

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



Sketch Map Photo Key

Photo Log

Name of Property: 3900 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.

City or Vicinity: Washington

County: --

State: District of Columbia

Photographer: Kendra Parzen

Date Photographed: December 1, 2016

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

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Photo 1 of 22

Front (east) elevation facing southwest.

Photo 2 of 22

Front entrance and center hall front elevation, facing southwest.

2 of 22

Photo 3 of 22

Center hall roof with cupola and chimneys, facing west.

Photo 4 of 22

Front (east) elevation of south connector and north elevation of south wing, facing southwest.

Photo 5 of 22

East elevation of south wing, facing southwest.

Photo 6 of 22

South elevation of south wing, facing northwest.

Photo 7 of 22

South elevation entrance, facing north.

Photo 8 of 22

South elevation of south wing, including basement level, facing east.

Photo 9 of 22

West elevation of south wing and connection to 1978 addition, facing northeast.

Photo 10 of 22

South elevation of north wing with staircase to basement level, facing north.

Photo 11 of 22

East elevation of north wing, facing west.

Photo 12 of 22

North elevation of north wing, facing southwest.

Photo 13 of 22

North wing entrance, facing south.

Photo 14 of 22

North elevation of north wing, facing southwest.

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Photo 15 of 22

View from second floor onto north courtyard showing connection between north wing and 1978 addition, facing west.

Photo 16 of 22

View from second floor onto south courtyard showing south and west elevations of original 1950s section, facing northeast.

Photo 17 of 22

View from south courtyard showing south elevation of 1950s section, facing northwest.

Photo 18 of 22

Typical window of original 1950s section in south courtyard, facing southeast.

Photo 19 of 22

View of flagstone drive, front brick wall, and urn on brick pedestal at base of drive, facing west.

Photo 20 of 22

Molded doorway inside front lobby, facing west.

Photo 21 of 22

First floor central elevator bank, facing north.

Photo 22 of 22

Typical hallway and office space in north wing, second floor, facing east.

Returned

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.

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Photograph 1 of 22: Front (east) elevation facing southwest.

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Photograph 2 of 22: Front entrance and center hall front elevation, facing southwest.

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Photograph 3 of 22: Center hall roof with cupola and chimneys, facing west.

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Photograph 4 of 22: Front (east) elevation of south connector and north elevation of south wing, facing southwest.

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Photograph 5 of 22: East elevation of South wing, facing southwest.

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Photograph 6 of 22: South elevation of south wing, facing northwest.

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Photograph 7 of 22: South elevation entrance, facing north.

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Photograph 8: South elevation of south wing,
including basement level, facing east.

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Photograph 9 of 22: West elevation of south wing and connection to 1978 addition, facing northeast.

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Photograph 10 of 22: South elevation of north wing with staircase to basement level, facing north.

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Photograph 11 of 22: East elevation of north wing, facing west.

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Photograph 12 of 22: North elevation of north wing, facing southwest.

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Photograph 13 of 22: North wing entrance, facing south.

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Photograph 14 of 22: North elevation of north wing, facing southwest.

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Photograph 15 of 22: View from second floor onto north courtyard showing connection between north wing and 1978 addition, facing west.

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Photograph 16 of 22: View from second floor on south courtyard showing south and west elevations of original 1950s section, facing northeast.

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Photograph 17 of 22: View from south courtyard showing south elevation of 1950s section, facing northwest.

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Photograph 18 of 22: Typical window of original 1950s section in south courtyard, facing southeast.

Equitable Life Insurance Building
Name of Property

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Photograph 19 of 22: View of flagstone drive, front brick wall, and urn on brick pedestal at base of drive, facing west.

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Photograph 20 of 22: Molded doorway inside front lobby, facing west.

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Photograph 21 of 22: First floor central elevator bank, facing north.

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Photograph 22 of 22: Typical hallway and office space in north wing, second floor, facing east.



3900



FannieMae

3900



Fannie Mae







































102
ELEVATOR
CLOSET

102

102
ELEVATOR
CLOSET

102
ELEVATOR
CLOSET



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: Equitable Life Insurance Building

Multiple Name:

State & County: DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, District of Columbia

Date Received: 1/8/2018 Date of Pending List: 1/29/2018 Date of 16th Day: 2/13/2018 Date of 45th Day: 2/22/2018 Date of Weekly List:

Reference number: SG100002110

Nominator: State

Reason For Review:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal | <input type="checkbox"/> PDIL | <input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver | <input type="checkbox"/> National | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> CLG | |

Accept Return Reject 2/14/2018 Date

Abstract/Summary
Comments:

Recommendation/ Criteria Nomination is being returned for additional information. See National Register Return Sheet for detailed comment.

Reviewer Patrick Andrus Patrick Andrus Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2218 Date 2/14/2018

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Evaluation/Return Sheet

Property Name: Equitable Life Insurance Building
State and County: DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, District of Columbia
Reference Number: SG100002110

Reason for Return:

The nomination is being returned for additional information. The nomination form does not provide a description of the interior of the original building, its wings, and the non-contributing rear addition. The National Register requires a description of the interior of individually nominated buildings, including non-contributing sections. Please provide more details on the interior of this building.

Is the garage, which is outside of the nominated boundary, connected to the building, either above or below ground?

Section 10: In Section 10 of the form, the acreage of the nominated property is not provided. Please provide acreage.

Patrick Andrus

Patrick Andrus, Historian
National Register of Historic Places
2/14/2018

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE



MEMO

DATE: June 11, 2019

TO: Paul Lusignan

FROM: Kim Williams *KW*

RE: Transmittal Letter for Equitable Life Insurance Building

Please find enclosed three disks for the Equitable Life Insurance National Register nomination as revised. The enclosed disk, Disk 1 of 3 contains the true and correct copy of the nomination as revised per comments included in the NR return document dated 2/14/2018. The enclosed Disks 2 and 3 of 3 contain photographs as per the NR photo requirements.

and reflecting new site conditions.

I have also included a new, signed NR cover sheet, though if the 2018 cover is still on-file and preferred, please discard this new one.