

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Oscar W. Underwood House

AND/OR COMMON

Art Department Building, George Washington University

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

2000 G Street, NW.

__ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Washington

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

D.C.

__ VICINITY OF

STATE

District of Columbia

CODE

11

COUNTY

D.C.

CODE

001

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

George Washington University

Contact: J. C. Einbinder,
Director of Business Affairs

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Washington

__ VICINITY OF

STATE

District of Columbia

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Recorder of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

515 D Street, NW.

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

District of Columbia

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

None known.

DATE

__ FEDERAL __ STATE __ COUNTY __ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

| CONDITION | | CHECK ONE | CHECK ONE |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT | <input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED | <input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD | <input type="checkbox"/> RUINS | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED | <input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FAIR | <input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED | | |

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Senator Oscar W. Underwood resided in this north-facing 2½-story, mansard-roofed, 19th-century, brick rowhouse from 1914 to 1925. According to the Alabama State Historic Preservation Officer, the Senator's Alabama residences have been destroyed. So have his earlier Washington-area domiciles--the Grafton and Cockrin Hotels. Thus, except for Woodlawn Mansion, this is the only known extant Underwood dwelling. It stands amid similar houses on the corner of G and 20th Streets, NW., and serves currently as quarters for the Art Department of George Washington University. For several years after Underwood vacated the structure, it housed the National Law Center. Its street facades remain little altered, but it has received a three-story brick wing at the rear. Inside, the original halls, stairs, and window trim remain; but the stair wells have been sealed between floors for fire protection, and some of the original rooms have been partitioned for offices. Still, the building retains the ambiance--especially externally--of Washington residential living in the early 20th century.

Painted grayish-tan with dark-brown trim on the street facades and rear, the red brick Underwood House sits on a brick foundation above a full, partially raised basement. A stone **water table** separates the basement and first-floor levels on the front facade, and a six-row brick **water table** crosses the east facade. Topping the dwelling is a mansard roof covered on the street facades with slate tiles laid in an imbricated pattern. Also on the street facades, a box cornice with entablature, paneled frieze, and ornamental support brackets adorns the lower roof edge and upper wall. Two paneled, brick, interior chimneys pierce the mansard's east slope, and between the two stacks, three pedimented dormers decorate. The center one contains two semicircularly arched, two-over-two sash windows; the others contain one similar window each. Three similar, single-windowed dormers grace the front or north mansard slope and carry out the three-bay-wide design evident at every level of the front facade.

All first- and second-story front openings are segmentally arched. On the ground floor, the entrance is right of center, and to its left are two two-over-two, double-hung sash windows with decorated stone lugsills and segmentally arched, stone hoodmolds. Three smaller, but similarly designed, windows punctuate the story above. Fenestration on the east side of the original block is irregular, but except for openings in a center-placed, first-floor, octagonal bay, all windows are rectangular, two-over-two, double-hung sash, and all have stone lugsills. Openings in the brown-painted bay are segmentally arched, two-over-two sash. The bay features a bracket-supported box cornice and flat, balustraded roof.

(continued)

8 SIGNIFICANCE

| PERIOD | AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING | <input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499 | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION | <input type="checkbox"/> LAW | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599 | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS | <input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE | <input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699 | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY | <input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> ART | <input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC | <input type="checkbox"/> THEATER |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE | <input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900- | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION | | |

SPECIFIC DATES 1914-25 (1900-25) BUILDER/ARCHITECT Unknown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Oscar W. Underwood--Congressman, U.S. Senator, and important Presidential contender--was the driving force behind the Underwood-Simmons Tariff of 1913. He pushed to final passage what historian Arthur S. Link has described as the "most honest tariff measure that had been proposed since 1861" in that it had no devices to cover up exorbitant rates and provided for "moderate protection by placing domestic industries in a genuinely competitive position with regard to European manufacturers."¹

Elected to Congress in 1896, Underwood vaulted into national prominence after the 1910 elections when Democrats regained control of that body and made him House Majority Leader. According to distinguished historian C. Vann Woodward, the "tact and assurance with which he marshaled the new Democratic majority into a unified and effective party, for the first time in a generation, demonstrated a genius for leadership."² As a result, Underwood became a leading contender for the 1912 Democratic Presidential nomination. Significantly, he was the first resident of the South to be seriously considered for that high office since the Civil War. The Alabaman had considerable strength at the national convention but fell far short of a majority; still, it was his withdrawal just before the 46th ballot that enabled Woodrow Wilson to win the nomination.

In 1914 Underwood won election to the U.S. Senate where he proved invaluable to the Wilson administration, particularly in financing World War I and in fighting for the League of Nations. In 1921 Underwood became Democratic Minority Leader, which made him, according to historian Nancy Johnston Black, "the first parliamentary

(continued)

¹ Arthur S. Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917 (New York, 1954), 38.

² C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge, 1951), 476.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Black, Nancy Johnston, "Oscar Wilder Underwood," unpublished manuscript in possession of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, D.C.

Dabney, Virginius, "Oscar Wilder Underwood," Dictionary of American Biography, X (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), 117-19.
(continued)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

| | | | | | | | |
|---|------|------------|--------------|---|------|---------|----------|
| A | 1 8 | 3 2 26 2 0 | 43 10 72 4 0 | B | | | |
| | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING | | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING |
| C | | | | D | | | |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary of the nominated property coincides with the boundary of the legal lot known as 2000 G Street, NW., Washington, D.C.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|-------|------|--------|------|
| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE George R. Adams, Managing Editor; and
Ralph Christian, Assistant Editor

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| ORGANIZATION | DATE |
| American Association for State and Local History | March 1976 |
| STREET & NUMBER | TELEPHONE |
| 1400 Eighth Avenue South | (615) 242-5583 |
| CITY OR TOWN | STATE |
| Nashville | Tennessee 37203 |

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE ___ LOCAL ___

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

| | |
|--|------|
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
| I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER | |
| | DATE |
| DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION | DATE |
| ATTEST: | DATE |
| KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER | |

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Underwood House-

CONTINUATION SHEET G. Washington UQTEM NUMBER 7 PAGE one

The rear wing, which displays three bays along its east side and two across its rear, contains industrial windows--except at the first-floor level of the east side. There the openings have been closed with bricks and the interior space converted into a modern classroom-auditorium. A plain, enclosed, rectangular, basement-level entrance portico stands at the north end of the wing's east side; the only rear entrance is a single door at the top-floor level, which is accessible by a black-painted, steel fire escape.

A low, black-painted, wrought-iron fence flanks the sidewalks on the east and north sides of the Underwood House. Stone steps ascend from the street to a short, yard-level, front walk, from which additional stone steps with iron balusters mount to the front stoop. The entrance here consists of a pair of ornately paneled, brown-painted, wooden, double doors set under a segmentally arched glass transom.

The front doors open into a small foyer, where another pair of double doors--white-painted with etched glass upper panels and wood lower panels similar to those of the outer doors--reveal a right-hand side-hall plan. A few feet from the front doors and along the right wall of the approximately 6-foot-wide hallway, a slightly curved, single-flight, balustered, open-string stair rises to the second floor. There a similar stair ascends to the top floor. Another first-story stair of similar design mounts to the second floor from the rear of the hall; it has no counterpart leading to the top story.

Along the left side of the first floor are three offices, a small conference room, and a small stockroom, where apparently during Underwood's day there were no more than two or three chambers. Although ceilings have been lowered here, as throughout the building, and partitions added, the original interior window trim, including folding shutters that recess into the window facings, remains in most rooms and recalls the structure's use as a residence. The second and third floors reveal the same general plan as the first: right-hand corridor, with either offices or classrooms along the left side and a studio in the rear wing above the modern classroom-auditorium. The third floor offices are created by a sliding curtain, however, rather than by a permanent partition.

(continued)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

Underwood House-
CONTINUATION SHEET G. Washington U. ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE two

No original furniture remains in the house, but despite this and the above-noted interior alterations, the structure merits consideration for National Historic Landmark recognition because Underwood lived here during most of the period of his greatest national significance.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

| |
|------------------|
| FOR NPS USE ONLY |
| RECEIVED |
| DATE ENTERED |

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Underwood House-
CONTINUATION SHEET G. Washington UJTEM NUMBER 8 PAGE one

leader since Henry Clay to lead his party in both House and Senate."³ Underwood's tenure in the Upper Chamber proved unhappy, however, because many Democrats considered him too conservative and sharply criticized his support of the Mellon Plan and immigration restriction, his opposition to the soldiers' bonus, and his service to the Harding administration as an American delegate at the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-22.

In 1924 Underwood again tried to win the Democratic Presidential nomination. He attracted great attention by making denunciation of the Ku Klux Klan an issue in an effort to embarrass front runner William G. McAdoo, much of whose potential strength lay in areas where the Klan was popular. By this maneuver, Underwood hoped to create a deadlock between the supporters of McAdoo and Alfred E. Smith and eventually emerge as the party's standard bearer. Underwood took his fight against the Klan to the floor of the convention where his motion to denounce that organization by name in the Democratic platform was defeated by only one vote. Although the convention deadlocked between Smith and McAdoo. Underwood was unable to make headway, according to late President John F. Kennedy, because "the Louisiana delegation and other Southerners publicly repudiated him for his attacks on the Klan."⁴

Senator Oscar W. Underwood resided in this north-facing 2½-story, mansard-roofed, 19th-century, brick rowhouse from 1914 to 1925. According to the Alabama State Historic Preservation Officer, the Senator's Alabama residences have been destroyed. So have his earlier Washington-area domiciles--the Grafton and Cockrin Hotels. Thus, except for Woodlawn Mansion, this is the only known extant Underwood dwelling.

(continued)

3 Nancy Johnston Black, "Oscar Wilder Underwood," unpublished manuscript in the possession of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, D.C.

4 John F. Kennedy, Profiles in Courage (New York, 1957), 193.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Underwood House-

CONTINUATION SHEET G. Washington U. ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE TWO

Biography

Oscar Wilder Underwood was born May 6, 1862, in Louisville, Ky., to Eugene and Frederica Underwood. In 1865 his socially prominent family moved to St. Paul, Minn., because of his mother's health and remained there for 10 years. St. Paul at this time was on the edge of the frontier, and young Oscar's boyhood proved exciting, especially since such famous men as William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody, Colonel George Armstrong Custer, and General Winfield Scott Hancock were neighbors. In 1875 the Underwood family returned to Louisville, and Oscar soon entered Rugby, a private preparatory school. Graduating in 1880, he spent 1 year working at various jobs including a stint as a railroad engineer in Birmingham, Ala. In 1881 Oscar entered the University of Virginia to study law, remaining there for 3 years but never obtaining a degree. Admitted to the bar in 1884, he practiced briefly in Minnesota before moving to Birmingham, Ala., where within a few years he became one of that growing city's leading attorneys.

In 1894 Underwood entered politics and ran for Congress as a free silver Democrat. Apparently elected, he took his seat in 1895, but Truman H. Aldrich, his Republican opponent, challenged the election, and Underwood was unseated in June 1896. That fall, however, Underwood won an overwhelming victory at the polls, and he served continuously in the House until his election to the Senate in 1914. Largely quiet and unobtrusive, he attracted little national attention until after Democrats won control of Congress in the 1910 elections. He then became House Majority Leader, and according to historian Jack E. Kendrick, "was able to accomplish what was thought impossible--to weld together the various factions of the Democrats into a working majority," thus demonstrating that the party "could be trusted with the reins of government and that it had a constructive program."⁵ In 1911 when President William Howard Taft called a

(continued)

⁵ Jack E. Kendrick, "Alabama Congressmen in the Wilson Administration," Alabama Review, XXIV (October, 1971).

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Underwood House-
CONTINUATION SHEET G. Washington U. ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE three

special session of Congress to deal with the question of tariff reciprocity with Canada, Underwood as chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, lined up Democratic support for reciprocity on the grounds that it was compatible with party principles. At the same time, however, he pushed through a revised tariff bill which pushed many of the schedules downward. Taft vetoed it, making tariff revision one of the leading issues in the 1912 Presidential campaign.

Because of his prominence, Underwood became one of the leading contenders for the 1912 Democratic Presidential nomination. His "candidacy was unique," says historian Arthur S. Link, "in that it represented the only attempt since 1860 of a resident Southerner to win the Democratic nomination."⁶ Although the Alabaman won several primaries and had considerable strength at the National Convention, he fell far short of a majority. Nevertheless, it was his withdrawal just before the 46th ballot that enabled Woodrow Wilson to win the nomination.

In 1913 Underwood was chiefly responsible for the passage of what became known as the Underwood-Simmons Tariff. For the most part, it was the same bill he had written 2 years earlier and which had been vetoed by Taft. According to historian Arthur S. Link, the 1913 bill was the "most honest tariff measure that had been proposed since 1861" in that it had no devices to cover up exorbitant rates and provided for "moderate protection by placing domestic industries in a genuinely competitive position with regard to European manufacturers."⁷ Rates were reduced on an average from 40 to 29 percent, and many items like agricultural machinery, certain consumer goods, and trust-made products like iron and steel were placed on the duty-free list.

In 1914 Underwood won election to the U.S. Senate where he proved an invaluable ally of the Wilson administration. According to eminent historian Francis Butler Simkins, Underwood "played a con-

(continued)

6 Arthur S. Link, Wilson: The Road to the White House (Princeton, 1947), 408.

7 Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 38.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Underwood House-

CONTINUATION SHEET G. Washington U. ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE four

structive part in formulating the financial measures of World War I and in Wilson's unsuccessful fight for senatorial acceptance of the League of Nations."⁸

In 1921 Senate Democrats elected Underwood Minority Leader, making him the first man since Henry Clay to lead his party in both Houses of Congress. His tenure in this latter post proved unhappy, however, because liberal Democrats believed him "too conservative to make the Democratic party thoroughly progressive."⁹ Earlier he had opposed measures like prohibition, woman suffrage, and the child labor amendment, and during the Harding administration, Underwood supported the Mellon Plan and immigration restriction and opposed the soldiers' bonus and George Norris' plan to make Muscle Shoals a public power project. He angered many Democrats when he accepted appointment as one of four U.S. representatives to the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-22. He did, however, refuse President Harding's offer to appoint him to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Despite his somewhat controversial standing in the Democratic Party, Underwood, in 1924, again tried to win the Presidential nomination. He made denunciation of the Ku Klux Klan an issue in an effort to embarrass front-runner William G. McAdoo, much of whose potential strength lay in areas where the Klan was popular. By this maneuver, Underwood hoped to create a deadlock between the supporters of McAdoo and Alfred E. Smith and eventually emerge as the party's standard bearer. Underwood took his fight against the Klan to the floor of the convention where his motion to denounce that organization by name in the Democratic platform was defeated by only one vote. When it became clear that neither Smith nor McAdoo could be nominated, Smith offered to swing his supporters behind Underwood if he could get the support of two other southern States behind Alabama. This proved impossible, however, says biographer Virginius Dabney, because Under-

(continued)

⁸ Francis Butler Simkins, A History of the South, Third Edition (New York, 1963), 550.

⁹ Cited in George B. Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945 (Baton Rouge, 1967), 242.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Underwood House-

CONTINUATION SHEET G. Washington U. ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE five

wood's "uncompromising hostility to the Klan and national prohibition had alienated the South."¹⁰

In 1925 Underwood, who had only narrowly won renomination in 1920, announced he would not run for the Senate again in 1926. Retiring to historic Woodlawn Plantation near Mount Vernon, Va., he published in 1928 Drifting Sands of Party Politics, a discussion of his political philosophy. On January 25, 1929, he suffered a paralytic stroke at Woodlawn and died that same day at the age of 66.

Continuation Sheet Woodlawn Plantation Item Number 9 Page one

Kendrick, Jack E., "Alabama Congressmen in the Wilson Administration," Alabama Review, XXIV (October, 1971), 243-60.

Kennedy, John F., Profiles in Courage (New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1957).

Link, Arthur S., Wilson: The Road to the White House (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947).

_____, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917 (New York: Harper & Row, 1954).

Simkins, Francis Butler, A History of the South, Third Edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963).

Tindall, George B., The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967).

Underwood, Oscar W., Drifting Sands of Party Politics (New York: The Century Co., 1931).

¹⁰ Virginius Dabney, "Oscar Wilder Underwood," Dictionary of American Biography, X (New York, 1936), 118.

212

APPROVED

July 17, 1991

**THE WASHINGTON COLLEGE OF LAW
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

Statement of Historical Significance
for National Historic Landmark Nomination

Gail Lee Dubrow
Assistant Professor
Department of Urban Design and Planning
College of Architecture and Urban Planning
University of Washington
410 Gould Hall
Seattle, Washington 98195

April 1990

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 WASHINGTON COLLEGE OF LAW Page 1

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

The building at 2000 G Street in Washington, D.C. was home for 28 years to the Washington College of Law, the first coeducational law school established by women in the United States. Within the context of the National Historic Landmark Program thematic framework the Washington College of Law has national significance under theme: XXVIII. The Law. (C) Law Schools, Offices, Journals. From the turn of the century through much of the twentieth century, law schools operated by and for women were essential vehicles for advancing the status of women in the legal profession.

The last quarter of the 19th century was a critical period for women in the eastern United States seeking a legal education, according to Karen Berger Morello, author of The Invisible Bar: The Woman Lawyer in America. Increasing numbers of women applied for admission to law school as the 19th century came to a close, only to encounter intense opposition from the male faculty and students within them. At the most elite institutions, resistance to coeducation was especially dogged. Consequently, "when upper-class [white] women found themselves having to mingle with low-class women or men of other races in order to get a professional degree they often sought to establish new law schools rather than adjust to established ones."¹

While a number of individual women managed to overcome male resistance and gain admission to the existing law schools during this period, many more gained a legal education at the newly founded institutions to which Berger has referred. Emma Gillett and Ellen Spencer Mussey were instrumental in remedying the problem of access to legal education for women in the nation's capital. The institution that they founded in April 1898, the Washington College of Law, was the first coeducational law school established by women, dedicated to advancing the status of women in the legal profession.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 WASHINGTON COLLEGE OF LAW Page 2

=====
The founders of the Washington College of Law epitomized a generation of women who were forced to enter the legal profession through the "back door," so to speak. In response to the difficulties that they had encountered, and which continued to confront the next generation of women seeking a legal education, Gillett and Mussey established a coeducational institution that would put women on an equal footing with their male counterparts in the profession.

Emma Gillett was one of the many women of her generation who were deeply moved by Belva Lockwood's example. As a result, she sought entry to Washington, D.C.'s law schools in the wake of Lockwood's 1879 victory, when the pioneering woman lawyer secured the right to practice before the United States bar.

Born in Wisconsin in 1852, Emma Gillett was raised in a family sympathetic to the woman's rights movement. Although Emma's father had died just two years after her birth, his interest in the law and local position as justice-of-the-peace inspired her. As a young woman, Emma began informal legal studies with her father's copy of Blackstone's Commentaries. Her mother was an important liberalizing influence, as a follower of the dress reform movement.² In 1870, after graduation from Lake Erie Seminary, Emma Gillett began teaching school in Pennsylvania, where she read law books in the evening at home. Hearing of Lockwood's 1879 victory, she immediately moved to Washington, D.C. where for a short time she lived in Lockwood's home and studied in her law office. For the first time, Gillett met other women like herself who were devoted to studying law. A member of Lockwood's inner circle, Gillett soon found herself immersed in a whirlwind of feminist political activities.

Determined to obtain a formal legal education, Gillett soon tried to gain admission to the District of Columbia's law schools, including National and Columbian, only to be refused on account of her sex. Consequently, Gillett along with two other white women enrolled at Howard University in 1880. Three years later, in 1883, Gillett graduated from its law school and gained admission to the D.C. Bar.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

WASHINGTON COLLEGE OF LAW

Page 3

=====
Independent women clients formed the core of Gillett's legal practice in the early years. President Garfield appointed her a notary public, a position that took her into "the homes of [Civil] War widows to execute their pension vouchers."³ This work brought her into contact with clients of independent financial means, including Mrs. Ulysses S. Grant, Mrs. Philip Sheridan, and Mrs. George H. Thomas. Notary commissions led to the management of some estates. Eventually Gillett established a partnership in realty law with liberal attorney Watson Newton.

In contrast to Gillett's struggle to enter a legal profession that was resistant to women, Ellen Spencer Mussey's way was paved by her husband's legal practice. Born in 1850, Ellen Spencer was the daughter of a prominent educator who promoted "Spencerian Script," the form of handwriting that became the school standard in the last part of the 19th century. After five years of intermittent higher education at seminaries in Ohio, Illinois and New York State, Ellen moved to Washington, D.C. in 1869, where she "took charge of the 'ladies' department' of her brother's Spencerian Business College."⁴ Training young women for government jobs, this position gained visibility for Ellen Spencer in Washington circles. In 1871, Ellen Spencer quit teaching to marry a successful Washington lawyer, Reuben Delavan Mussey.

He built a successful law practice, taught at Howard University Law School, and was a leader in the Swedenborgian Church, which Mrs. Mussey, originally a Baptist, also joined. During the first years of their marriage she was busy with domestic responsibilities ... but in 1876, when [her husband] suffered an attack of malaria, she began working with him at his law office. Though she had no previous legal training, Mrs. Mussey learned quickly and enthusiastically; she continued to go to the office after her husband's recovery and worked with him for the next 16 years.⁵

Mussey was motivated to seek formal admission to the Bar with the death of her husband in 1892. According to a biographer,

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 WASHINGTON COLLEGE OF LAW Page 4

=====
The usual method was a written examination, but this she felt emotionally unable to face. She applied to the law schools of National University and Columbian College (later George Washington University) in Washington, a diploma from either of which would have entitled her to automatic admission, but both refused her on the grounds of her sex. Finally a special waiver was granted, and she qualified for the Washington bar by oral examination on March 28, 1893. She was later admitted to practice before the Supreme Court of the United States (1896) and the U.S. Court of Claims (1897).⁶

For the most part, Ellen Spencer Mussey continued the legal practice alone, specializing in probate, commercial and international law.

Mussey was continuing the legal practice of her deceased husband when she was approached by a young woman, Delia Jackson, who wanted to study in Mussey's office for the bar. The prospect of educating Jackson was too daunting a project for the informally trained Mussey to take on alone. Rather than refuse her request, however, the sympathetic attorney proposed that if Jackson were able to return with at least two others, Emma Gillett's assistance would be sought to establish a part-time law class.

Indeed, Jackson returned with several others and in 1896 Gillett and Mussey, with the help of a few associates (such as Gillett's partner Newton), opened the first session of the Woman's Law Class. Meetings of the first law classes alternated between the offices of Mussey and Gillett.⁷ An early announcement for the school decried the sex-biased policies of local law schools such as National and Columbian. It read,

Women are admitted to practice before all the Courts of the District of Columbia, the Court of Claims, the Supreme Court of the United States, and the Executive Departments, but they are denied admission to such law schools of the District as confine their membership to

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 WASHINGTON COLLEGE OF LAW Page 5

=====

white persons. The Woman's Law Class was opened February 1, 1896, to afford women the opportunity for a thorough course of legal study which will increase their intellectual grasp, be useful to them in business life, and fit them for the practice of law."⁸

When after two years of study the first six students were ready to graduate, Gillett and Mussey tried to admit them to Columbian Law School in preparation for taking the bar exams. Once again, permission was denied. So Gillett and Mussey decided to establish a permanent college in the District of Columbia where women would be guaranteed a legal education.

Discrimination against women at all of the District of Columbia's law schools, with the exception of black Howard University, led Gillett and Mussey to establish the coeducational Washington College of Law in 1898. "Soon after its incorporation in 1898, Washington College of Law secured the second floor of an historic mansion at 627 E Street."

The E Street location was less than ideal; the furnace broke down at the first sign of cold weather, and the owner of the building, being a devotee of John Barleycorn, acquired the habit of attending classes whenever he imbibed.⁹

Still, the marginal conditions of these facilities allowed the founders to set an affordable tuition rate. In 1899 members of the first graduating class were awarded the LL.B. degree. An honorary degree also was bestowed upon Ellen Spencer Mussey, who was installed as the school's first dean, a position she occupied for nearly fifteen years. Gillett took over the deanship after Mussey's retirement, providing direction and continuity from 1913 until her own retirement in 1923.

The Washington College of Law moved a number of times in the years that followed, as limited financial resources and uncertainty about enrollment hindered efforts to establish permanent facilities.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 WASHINGTON COLLEGE OF LAW Page 6

=====

In 1900 the Law School moved to the Le Droit Building on the corner of 8th and F Streets. Here there seemed to be a prejudice against lighting the halls and stairways, and students stumbled in total darkness to the second floor.

Two moves and nine years later, Mrs. Mussey secured a lease on three rooms in the Chesley building at 1317 New York Avenue. The next few years brought a rapid increase in enrollment, and by 1920 the school occupied six rooms in the Chesley Building.

Fund raising efforts by students and faculty enabled the Washington College of Law to purchase its first permanent home in 1920. Its new residence was the former home of philosopher Robert Ingersoll at 1315 K Street. Soon, the Law School outgrew the entire building.¹⁰

The limited periods of occupancy and, in the case of the Chesley Building, the partial use of the facilities, weaken the case for National Historic Landmark designation at any of these buildings. However, in 1924 the Ellen Spencer Mussey finally raised sufficient funds to purchase a permanent home for Washington College of Law, the spacious former residence of Senator Underwood of Alabama at 2000 G Street.

The new building at 2000 G Street was spacious and elegant. In the entrance hall, a massive, hammered brass, Turkish swinging lamp hung from the ceiling. A large marble mantel and fireplace dominated the reception room, and a winding Colonial staircase of dark mahogany and old ivory led to the upper floors. Three large classrooms, a kitchen, and a ladies tearoom transformed the old mansion into a school building.¹¹

So well-suited was the 2000 G Street building to the Law School's purposes that the institution remained there for the next 28 years, for the rest of its life as an independent coeducational law school and for several years more under the auspices of

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 WASHINGTON COLLEGE OF LAW Page 7

=====

American University, with which it merged in 1949. As such, it is the most appropriate place to commemorate the contributions of the Washington College of Law to the history of legal education.

Ardent feminists, Mussey and Gillett both were active in District and national politics. However of the two, Mussey was the one who attained greater prominence. In part this was due to her family connections to key educational, legal and political institutions in the nation's capital.

Mussey is credited with advancing the rights of women through her work on a number of social reforms.

As chairman of the committee on legislation of the District of Columbia Federation of Women's Clubs, she became involved in 1894 in the struggle for an improved married women's property act for the District; owing in large part to her efforts a bill was passed by Congress in 1896 giving women equal rights of guardianship with their husbands over their children. From 1906 to 1912 Mrs. Mussey served on the District of Columbia board of education, where she secured an appropriation of \$15,000 for the continuation of an experimental kindergarten, obtained approval for compulsory education, and worked successfully to establish a model school for retarded children. She was the leader in the creation of juvenile courts in the District of Columbia. Concerned also with the welfare of teachers, she was influential in the passage of the Teachers' Retirement and Pension Bill.¹²

As dean of the world's only law school run by and for women, Mussey found a solid institutional base from which she could carry out a platform of social reform.

Because the District's other (white) law schools didn't begin to open to women until 1911, women's enrollment at the Washington College of Law continued to rise during the first two decades of the twentieth century, with interesting political consequences. Direct experience with sex discrimination in the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 WASHINGTON COLLEGE OF LAW Page 8

=====

legal profession, combined with Mussey and Gillett's involvement, drew many Washington College of Law students into work for the woman's suffrage movement during its final campaign in the 1910s. The more militant of the two founders, Gillett was influential in gaining membership from among student ranks for the District's many suffrage clubs and for the more militant Congressional Union. Mussey, on the other hand, effectively built an enduring professional network among women attorneys. To her credit, she was instrumental in founding the National Association of Women Lawyers and the Women's Law Association of Washington, D.C.

A number of other law schools for women were established in the wake of the Washington College of Law's success. In Boston, according to Morello, where "it would be 1950 before women were able to obtain a law degree at every institution in ... the area," several law schools for women were established. Beginning as an evening bar-review class in 1908, the Portia Law School grew so popular that by 1919 it became a full-fledged institution, empowered to grant the bachelor of laws degree. Later, in 1922, a day division was formed. By 1948 the school had thirty professors on the faculty and four hundred and fifty students.¹³

So great was women's interest in law at elite colleges, such as Radcliffe, that its students organized in the attempt to open the doors of Harvard Law School to them, albeit unsuccessfully. Harvard's intractability led the Radcliffe seniors instead to establish the Cambridge Law School for Women in 1915, where its female students were educated by sympathetic members of the faculty from the institution that otherwise had shunned them.¹⁴

Over time, women gradually gained admission to the male-dominated law schools; George Washington University, for example, authorized the admission of five women to the law school in the fall of 1913.¹⁵ Interestingly, graduates of the Washington College of Law were among the first group to pursue advanced legal studies at George Washington University when it finally opened to women. Washington College of Law played an important role in advancing the cause of coeducation at universities such as George Washington, by demonstrating women's capacity to

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 WASHINGTON COLLEGE OF LAW Page 9

=====
successfully undertake legal education and become competent professionals. The education offered by Washington College of Law put male and female applicants on more nearly equal ground when they sought admission to the male-dominated law schools that belatedly embarked on the 'experiment' of coeducation.

In 1949 the Washington College of Law merged with the American University. During the 1950s, plans were made to relocate the Law School to the American University campus and finally, in 1963, ground-breaking ceremonies for the new building were held. While the school that Mussey and Gillett had founded retained its name, as a symbol of more than 50 years of independent operation, the union of these institutions signalled the beginning of an era marked by fuller integration of women into legal education, as the last bastions of sexism, such as Harvard, finally began to admit women.¹⁶

While the names of the earliest women legal pioneers, such as Belva Lockwood and Myra Bradwell, may be more well-known to the public than the institutions that their pioneering efforts inspired, these separate institutions merit recognition on account of the critical role that they played in the history of American legal education. In particular, the 28 year home of the Washington College of Law at 2000 G Street merits recognition because it was the place where -- for the first time in American history -- large numbers of women were assured an opportunity to study the law and gained entry into professional practice.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

WASHINGTON COLLEGE OF LAW

Page 10

=====

NOTES

1. Karen Berger Morello, The Invisible Bar: The Woman Lawyer in America: 1638 to the Present (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p. 69.
2. Dorothy Thomas, "Emma Millinda Gillett," Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 36-37.
3. "Emma M. Gillett, Pioneer Feminist, 1852-1927," Equal Rights (February 12, 1927).
4. Dorothy Thomas, "Ellen Spencer Mussey," Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 606.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., pp. 606-607.
7. "Building the Washington College of Law," The Advocate: Magazine of the Washington College of Law, American University (Fall 1984), p. 15.
8. Flier from the Woman's Law Class (1897-98). Scrapbook from the Washington College of Law, Special Collections, American University.
9. Ibid.
10. "Building the Washington College of Law," Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Dorothy Thomas, "Ellen Spencer Mussey," p. 607.
13. Karen Berger Morello, The Invisible Bar, p. 70.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 WASHINGTON COLLEGE OF LAW Page 11

=====

- 14. Karen Berger Morello, Ibid.
- 15. Elmer Kayser, Bricks Without Straw (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), p. 215.
- 16. Karen Berger Morello, The Invisible Bar, p. 100.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 9

WASHINGTON COLLEGE OF LAW

Page 1

=====

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Archives. Washington College of Law. American University Law School.

"Building the Washington College of Law," The Advocate: Magazine of the Washington College of Law, American University (Fall 1984), p. 15.

Hathaway, Grace. Faith Rides a Tortoise: A Biography of Ellen Spencer Mussey. Philadelphia, PA: John C. Winston Co., 1937.

Morello, Karen Berger. The Invisible Bar: The Woman Lawyer in America: 1638 to the Present. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.

Schade, Jean S. "The Washington College of Law: A History from the Founding of the College Until Its Merger with the American University." Master's Thesis, School of Librarianship, Catholic University, 1969.

Thomas, Dorothy. "Ellen Spencer Mussey." Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971.

Thomas, Dorothy. "Emma Millinda Gillett." Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971.