

SOUTH CAROLINA AVENUE
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS NO. DC-709

HABS
DC
WASH
636-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SOUTH CAROLINA AVENUE

HABS No. DC-709

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Location: South Carolina Avenue stretches from Second and F streets, SE, in a straight line northeast to Massachusetts Avenue and 15th Street, SE.

Owner/Manager: The right-of-way spanning from building line to building line is the property of the U.S. government; the paved roadways, sidewalks and the planted areas between are under the jurisdiction of the District of Columbia Department of Public Works.

Present Use: Minor thoroughfare used mostly by local traffic.

Significance: This avenue remains largely faithful to its design on the L'Enfant and Ellicott city plans. All of the reservations on the avenue remain basically intact since their official recognition in 1894. Much of the avenue, from its origin at Second Street, SE, to 14th Street, SE, is within the National Register Capital Hill Historic District.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of plan: 1791, L'Enfant Plan; 1792, Ellicott Plan.

2. Initial and subsequent alterations:

1887-1903: Road surface graded and paved with asphalt and macadam.

1970s: Two blocks closed between Seventh and Ninth streets diverting South Carolina Avenue traffic around Eastern Market Metro Station

B. Historical Context:

On Pierre L'Enfant's plan of 1791, this avenue originates at the James Creek Canal south of the Capitol. Running east at 70 degrees, it passes through a large reservation marked "E" (Garfield Park), crosses through a small open rectangular area between Fourth and Sixth streets (now Marion Park), intersects with Pennsylvania Avenue at an unmarked open area, and terminates at Kentucky Avenue.

On Andrew Ellicott's plan of 1792, the avenue traverses the city at the same angle, but originates two blocks west of the canal at Delaware Avenue. It crosses the canal, runs through Garfield Park, intersects Pennsylvania Avenue at a large open space, crosses Kentucky Avenue, and terminates at Massachusetts Avenue.

The land over which South Carolina Avenue was planned traversed the original holdings of Daniel Carroll, William Prout, Abraham Young and George Walker.¹ Soon after land for the avenue was transferred to the federal government in 1791, Capt. William Mayne Duncanson built his expansive and elegant home, one of the first recorded structures on the avenue, on a lot on the north side

¹ Toner map.

between Sixth and Seventh streets. Constructed in 1795, "the Maples" was reputedly referred to by George Washington as a "fine house in the woods between Capitol Hill and the Navy Yard."² Although it housed numerous prominent Washingtonians and it was located between the Capitol and the Marine Barracks and Navy Yard--areas that were relatively developed in the early 1800s--the Maples remained rather isolated until after the Civil War. Few of the houses in this area shown on the 1857-61 Boschke map actually front on South Carolina Avenue.³ The segment of the avenue between Pennsylvania and Massachusetts avenues was virtually deserted.

By 1887 the road surface appears to still have been entirely unpaved, but much of the neighborhood around it was being developed and several of the open spaces at its major intersections were improved by the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (OPB&G) under the jurisdiction of the Army Corps of Engineers.

The twenty-three-acre reservation at the south end of the avenue, (Reservation No. 17) contained natural springs and was intended by L'Enfant as a place for a cascade and "townhouses." By the middle of the 1800s, it had been earmarked as the site of a new jail, but was still largely unimproved. Although the OPB&G reported in 1887 that the southern end of the avenue was "located in a section of the city which, up to this date, has not been highly improved by private enterprise," the OPB&G had been improving this park and the long, narrow reservation between Fourth and Sixth streets (Reservation No. 18) since 1884.⁴

Pennsylvania Avenue, with streetcar tracks running its length to the Anacostia River, was experiencing more development than this avenue, so the reservations at its intersection with South Carolina, which had formerly been used as a dumping grounds, were enclosed with cast-iron post-and-pipe fences by 1884, and by 1887 featured shrubs and flowerbeds. A market erected in 1872 one block north of the avenue between Seventh and Eighth streets probably contributed to development in this area.

As Reservation Nos. 17 and 18 were improved in the 1880s, residences were built around them, and by 1901 a public elementary school was built at the southern end of the avenue at Second Street to serve the area's growing population. By 1903, the avenue was paved with asphalt block from Second Street to Eighth Street and with macadam from Eighth Street to Eleventh Street. The segment from Eleventh Street to Massachusetts Avenue, still unpaved in 1903, was lined with residences by the second decade of the twentieth century.

Since its initial development in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the avenue has remained a residential area with many of the original structures intact. The Maples, now called Friendship House, is now one of city's oldest residences. This area of the city began to decline in the mid twentieth century as middle- and upper-class occupants fled the city for Washington's growing suburbs, leading to the neglect of the parks and houses in the vicinity. The dwindling number of school-age children in the neighborhood led to the closing of the Dent School in

² Eberlein and Hubbard, 406.

³ Boschke map.

⁴ Annual Report . . . , 1887, 2576.

1947 and its conversion to a Board of Education maintenance shop.⁵ Since the late 1960s, however, the historic character of the area has come to be appreciated and much of Capitol Hill is now listed as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places. All of the South Carolina Avenue between Third and 14th streets, SE, is within the National Register Capital Hill Historic District. Nominated in 1976, the district was described as follows:

It has more grand 160-foot-wide avenues original to the L'Enfant Plan than elsewhere in the city, and the juxtaposition of these avenues with their wide setbacks, their squares, and their frequently imposing architecture and the narrower grid streets with their smaller scale structures creates an urban quality unique to this area.⁶

In the 1970s, the growing traffic problems in the city led to the construction of a subway system. The reservation at South Carolina Avenue's intersection with Pennsylvania Avenue became the site of Eastern Market Metro Station. This reservation was altered for subway construction when segments of the avenue abutting Reservation Nos. 44, 45, 48, and 49 were transferred to the National Park Service for park area, creating two large park areas where there had been four and alleviating confusion at the busy intersection with Pennsylvania Avenue.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Overall dimensions:

1. Width: From building line to building line, the avenue is 160' wide.
2. Length within city limits: All of this approximately 1.2 mile-long avenue is within the boundaries planned by L'Enfant.

B. Elements within the right-of-way:

1. Roadway: Between the curbs, the paved roadway supports two-lane, two-way traffic and parallel street parking. The segments between Second and Fourth streets and 13th Street and Massachusetts Avenue are paved with asphalt blocks, while the remainder is sheet asphalt.
2. Sidewalks and street trees: Concrete and brick sidewalks flank the full distance of the avenue. The street tree spaces between the sidewalks and the roadway feature a mixture of young and mature elm trees at the south end. North of Pennsylvania Avenue, a few very mature sycamores and young oaks are planted in tree cutouts delineated from the sidewalk with wood. The tree strips also feature signs, parking meters, traffic signals, Washington Globe light standards, and occasional square fiberglass trash receptacles.

⁵ Lee, 68-69.

⁶ National Register nomination, Capitol Hill Historic District.

3. Major reservations:
 - a. The avenue originates from the northeast side of Garfield Park, Reservation No. 17 (See HABS No. DC-674).
 - b. Between Fourth and Sixth streets, SE, the avenue is diverted around the rectangular Marion Park, Reservation No. 18 (See HABS No. DC-679).
 - c. Between Seventh and Ninth streets, the avenue is interrupted by a large square containing the Eastern Market Metro Station (See HABS No DC-670).
 4. Smaller reservations: Both of the smaller reservations along North Carolina Avenue remain intact since their enumeration in 1894; they were transferred from the jurisdiction of the National Park Service to the District of Columbia December 14, 1972.
 - a. Reservation No. 240: South of the avenue, east of Twelfth Street, north of C Street, SE. Officially identified in 1884, this triangular reservation abutting City Square No. N1017 was fully improved with sodding, concrete coping, and a flower bed by 1927. It now features an amorphous flowering shrub bed and is surrounded by concrete coping and an asphalt pathway.
 - b. Reservation No. 241: North of the avenue, west of 13th Street and south of C Street, SE. Officially identified in 1884, this triangular reservation was fully improved with sodding, concrete coping, and a flower bed by 1927. It is now broken into two parts by a paved street. The east section features five shrubs and a monument plaque commemorating St. Cyprian's Catholic Church that formerly faced the park from a nearby lot. The west portion has a single shade tree in the midst of a sodded area contained in quarter-round coping. The eastern end has been elongated.
 5. Front yards: For the most part, residences along the avenue have long front yards that are enclosed with fences and landscaped.
- C. Framing elements: Continuous rowhouses, some with protruding bays and stoops, frame the right-of-way and define a residential streetscape. The Maples still stands on the avenue, but it is set far back from the property line and its large front yard is landscaped as a park.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Maps:

Board of Public Works. "Exhibit Chart of Improved Streets and Avenues." 1872.

Boschke, A. "Topographical Map of the District of Columbia surveyed in the years '57, '58, and '59."

Ellicott, Andrew. "Plan of the City of Washington." 1792.

Hopkins, G. "Map of the District of Columbia from Official Records and Actual Surveys." 1887.

L'Enfant, Pierre Charles. "Plan of the City of Washington." 1791.

Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. "Plan of the City of Washington, District of Columbia, showing the Public Reservations." Prepared by Orville E. Babcock. 1871.

Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. "Map of the City of Washington showing the Public Reservations Under Control of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds." 1884, 1887, and 1894.

Toner, Joseph M. "Sketch of Washington in Embryo." 1874.

B. Early Views:

1927-29 Survey photographs of each reservation (photographs of reservations transferred from NPS to the District of Columbia are in the HSW Reservations Collection).

C. Bibliography:

Annual Reports of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1867-1933.

Eberlein, Harold Donaldson and Cortlandt Van Dyke Hubbard. Historic Houses of Georgetown and Washington City. Richmond: The Dietz Press Inc., 1958.

Lee, Antoinette J. "Public School Buildings of the District of Columbia, 1804-1930." Unpublished manuscript. 1989.

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Reservation Files. Office of Land Use. National Capital Region Headquarters. National Park Service.

Reservations Collection. Historical Society of Washington.

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

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HABS historian Sara Amy Leach was the project leader and Elizabeth J. Barthold was project historian. Architectural delineators were: Robert Arzola, HABS; Julianne Jorgensen, University of Maryland; Robert Juskevich, Catholic University of America; Sandra M. E. Leiva, US/ICOMOS-Argentina; and Tomasz Zweich, US/ICOMOS-Poland, Board of Historical Gardens and Palace Conservation. Katherine Grandine served as a data collector. The photographs are by John McWilliams, Atlanta, except for the aerial views, which are by Jack E. Boucher, HABS, courtesy of the U.S. Park Police - Aviation Division.