

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE



HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD  
APPLICATION FOR HISTORIC LANDMARK OR HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION

New Designation   X    
Amendment of a previous designation         
Please summarize any amendment(s)       

Property name   Columbia Hospital for Women    
*If any part of the interior is being nominated, it must be specifically identified and described in the narrative statements.*

Address   2425 L Street, NW  

Square and lot number(s)   Square 25 and Lot 19 (formerly 806)  

Affected Advisory Neighborhood Commission   ANC 2A  

Date of construction   1916   Date of major alteration(s)   1958 and 1978  

Architect(s)   Nathan Wyeth   Architectural style(s)   Italianate  

Original use   Hospital   Present use   Hospital Closed May 2002  

Property owner   Columbia Hospital for Women  

Legal address of property owner   2425 L Street, NW, Washington, D. C. 20037  

NAME OF APPLICANT(S)   Foggy Bottom Historic District Conservancy  

*If the applicant is an organization, it must submit evidence that among its purposes is the promotion of historic preservation in the District of Columbia. A copy of its charter, articles of incorporation, or by-laws, setting forth such purpose, will satisfy this requirement.*

Address/Telephone of applicant(s)   810 New Hampshire Ave., NW, Washington, D. C. 20037  

Attn.:   Thomas Bower, President H-202-337-0810, W-202-357-3293  

Name and title of authorized representative   Thomas Bower, President  

Signature of representative   Thomas W Bower   Date   23 July 2002  

Name and telephone of author of application   Thomas Bower H-202-337-0810, W-202-357-3293  

Date received   02-32    
H.P.O. staff   TD

To whom it may concern:

The Foggy Bottom Historic District Conservancy is a 501 (c) (3) charitable and educational corporation registered in the District of Columbia. Two of its purposes are "To promote the preservation of the historic resources and historic character of the Foggy Bottom Historic District and adjoining neighborhoods of Northwest Washington..." and "To represent the collective views of its members before any public or private decision maker...". The members assembled on 11 June 2002 and voted to seek the designation of the Columbia Women's Hospital and its landscape setback as an Historic Landmark and to have it listed in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register of Historic Places. A copy of the FBHDC Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws accompany this application.

This request for historic landmark status for the Columbia Hospital for Women building at 2425 L St., NW including its landscape setback is based on the belief that the structure and its placement have sufficient integrity that they convey, as shown in greater detail below, the following qualities making them worthy of such designation:

A. It qualifies as the site of myriad significant events in the life of the city both on an individual (birth hospital of over 275,000 babies) and socially important nature (an early and continuing instance of racial integration of public services within the city and site of many innovative medical advances).

B. The building is of sufficient age that it has been appreciated for decades as a handsome building well sited on its hill and deep lawn overlooking Foggy Bottom, the West End, Georgetown, and Pennsylvania Avenue. It dates from 1916 and, in spite of the addition of wings beginning in 1958, it remains quite recognizable from the day it accepted its first patient into its then and continuing state of the art facilities.

C 1. The site is the location of two historically significant buildings; the current structure and the 19th Century British Legation to the USA. The Legation building was destroyed to make way for the present building, but its presence remains visually as the origin of the landscape setback and there is a memorial to an historically significant event on the property (the signing of the Rush-Bagot Treaty).

C 2. It exemplifies the distinguishing characteristics of public hospital architecture of the early twentieth century and illustrates how the philosophy behind those building characteristics survived the test of time having been in constant use from 1916 to 2002.

C 3. Nathan Wyeth who designed the building was a prominent local architect and the Municipal Architect for the District of Columbia.

**Identification and Detail of Proposed Landmark Elements**

Landmark status is requested for the original facade of the Columbia Hospital for Women and its setback along L St. This historic building and site are located in District of Columbia Square 25 Lot 19 formerly 806 at 2425 L St., NW. This is the highest point of its lot in the center of the block along L St. between 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Streets. The block is formed by 24th Street, 25th Street, L Street and M Street NW just off of Pennsylvania Ave, NW at 25th St. While the interior has been changed, the exterior L St. façade of the central building and two Y shaped wings are largely in their original form and recognizable from its time of building.

Elements of the current structure for which we are not seeking landmark status are the 1958 Wilfred Goodwin wing to the east of the original structure and a smaller addition to the west and a rear entrance dating from 1978. These new wings are sympathetic in material and somewhat compatible in style, but not of sufficient importance to warrant landmark status.

It should be noted windows and roofing materials of the original facade have been upgraded, but they retain the generally Italianate original style, massing, and form. The porches at the end of each leg of the Y-shaped wings have been enclosed. Unfortunately, a sixth floor on the central building with an open veranda between the two original towers was removed and replaced with air conditioning units at some time during or after the 1958 addition.

In spite of these changes, the presence of the building and its significant setback present much the same view as they did during most of the twentieth century. It should be noted that a major part of the importance of landmark status would be to protect the placement of the building on its lot. The original building line remains that of the Maynard Mansion which was the previous building on the lot. It had been the British Legation to the United States prior to its purchase for the current and use. It has long provided an open space in the previously residential and now mixed use neighborhood reflecting the importance of this elevated site.

**Significance**

From its creation, the Columbia Hospital for Women was the city's public birthplace of choice for all races; being the primary maternity facility in the city. For the life of the building, while providing the most basic of health services, it was also a leading national and international innovator within the field of women's and infants' health. The Columbia Hospital for Women was closed to the public on 10 May 2002 until which time it functioned as a fully operational hospital specializing in obstetrics, gynecology, and prenatal services continuously in its present structure since 1916. As an organization, it was chartered by Congress in 1866.

The Columbia Hospital for Women is most significant in the life of this city for being the birthplace of the vast majority of individuals born in the District of Columbia during the twentieth century. From 1876 at the present site and from January 1916 to May 2002 in the current building this was the primary maternity hospital in the district. It served as the birth hospital of roughly 275,000 individuals. The original focus of the institution in its 1866 Congressional mandate was to be "...a hospital and dispensary for the treatment of diseases peculiar to women, and a lying-in asylum..." During its early history, there was an outpatient clinic and some treatment in the general medicine area. From 1930 until its closing, its primary focus was prenatal care, gynecology, and obstetrics. Among the notable individuals who have been born at the hospital were former Vice President Albert Gore, Mrs. Julie Nixon Eisenhower, and former DC City Council Chairman Arrington Dixon.

The hospital was always highly regarded for the quality and innovation of its care. It was open to all races from the time of its charter in 1866. In 1919, a program in prenatal care was established; and in 1921, it opened a prenatal clinic. In 1925, it was the first hospital to use an infant's foot prints for identification. It was one of the first hospitals to establish nurseries for premature infants and continued to be a leader in that field. It was the first maternity hospital to provide classes for the expectant fathers. It was an early leader in the care of children; the present Children's Hospital is an outgrowth of Columbia Hospital's Clinic for Children.

### **Integrity and Distinguishing Characteristics**

The Columbia Hospital for Women's spaces were arranged for functionality in a generally Italianate style. It was designed by Nathan Wyeth and constructed by the George E. Wyne Company under the supervision of Elliott Woods. Mr. Wyeth was the Chief Designer in the Office of the Architect of the Capitol, served as the Municipal Architect for the District of Columbia, and had a prominent career as an architect.

The building displays the importance of light and air in medical facilities that was part of the advances in medical thinking in the early years of the last century. It is a five story yellow-brown brick building with originally a tile roof. In the 1950s, this roof was replaced with metal roofing which retained the shape, if not the texture, of the original roof. There are two Y-shaped wings to either side of and in front of the central building. In addition, there is a three story tower above each wing. Originally, above the central structure, there was a floor with open pillared veranda which related to the towers. It was removed and replaced by air conditioners in the 1950s. The first four floors are marked by rows of seven evenly spaced rectangular windows. The tapestry bricked top floor has three paired arched windows each under a tiled monogram brickwork arch. Each pair of windows is separated by a simple arched window.

The wings are of a height similar to the central structure though with low pediments with a cornice of decorative brickwork similar to that found on a number of homes in the neighboring Foggy Bottom Historic District. The stem of the Y of each wing has courses of rectangular windows with an arched course across the top floor on the L St. side. At the top of each of the towers are three arched windows on each side except the rear. On each side of the three story arms of the Y are three courses of rectangular window. The end of each arm is composed of floor to ceiling window arrangements replacing the original open porches yet still reflecting the importance of ventilation and sunlight in health facilities in early twentieth century medical thought.

### **Importance of Site and Landscape Setback**

An important part of the request for landmark status is the building's setback along L St. which signifies the importance the site held for the city. This placement well back from the street on the top of a hill overlooking Georgetown and between it and the White House was not a trivial placement. It was an early site of the British Embassy. A stone retaining wall along 25<sup>th</sup> St. from L St. may date from the period this building. Opposite the L St. main entrance to the hospital, there is a bronze plaque sculpted by Benjamin Johnson on a concrete monument dedicated in 1935 by Kiwanis International. Male figures holding the shields of the United States and Canada stand on either side of a statement about the site commemorating the Rush-Bagot Agreement of April 1817 which provided for the restriction of the naval forces on the Great Lakes and is still in force. The treaty was negotiated on behalf of Canada in the British Legation which originally stood on this site. That the Columbia Hospital for Women was placed on such a prominent location indicates the importance given to such a facility by the city. The Columbia Hospital for Women retained that setback and provided historic open space that has been retained and is an important feature of the neighborhood. It is hoped that any future building on the site would eliminate the one story structure at the eastern end of L St. It was part of the post-1958 addition, intrudes on the historic building line, and obstructs the view of the original structure from the southeast.

### **Conclusion**

The Foggy Bottom Historic District Conservancy respectfully submits these findings to meet the criteria supporting the designation of the Columbia Hospital for Women as a Historic Landmark and listing in the DC Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register of Historic Places. The building and its setting were significant in the life of an immense number of the citizens of the District of Columbia as their birthplace and the location of important medical innovation following its prominence as the site of an early British Legation. It was designed by prominent local architect Nathan Wyeth who created a time tested attractive building.

**Bibliography**

**Books**

Scott, Pamela and Lee, Antoinette J., Buildings of the District of Columbia, Oxford University Press, 1993

Records of the Columbia Historical Society, The Legacy of diplomacy

**Magazines**

American Journal of Nursing, February 1934; A Historic Hospital; Lawson, Adda M.;

**Newspapers**

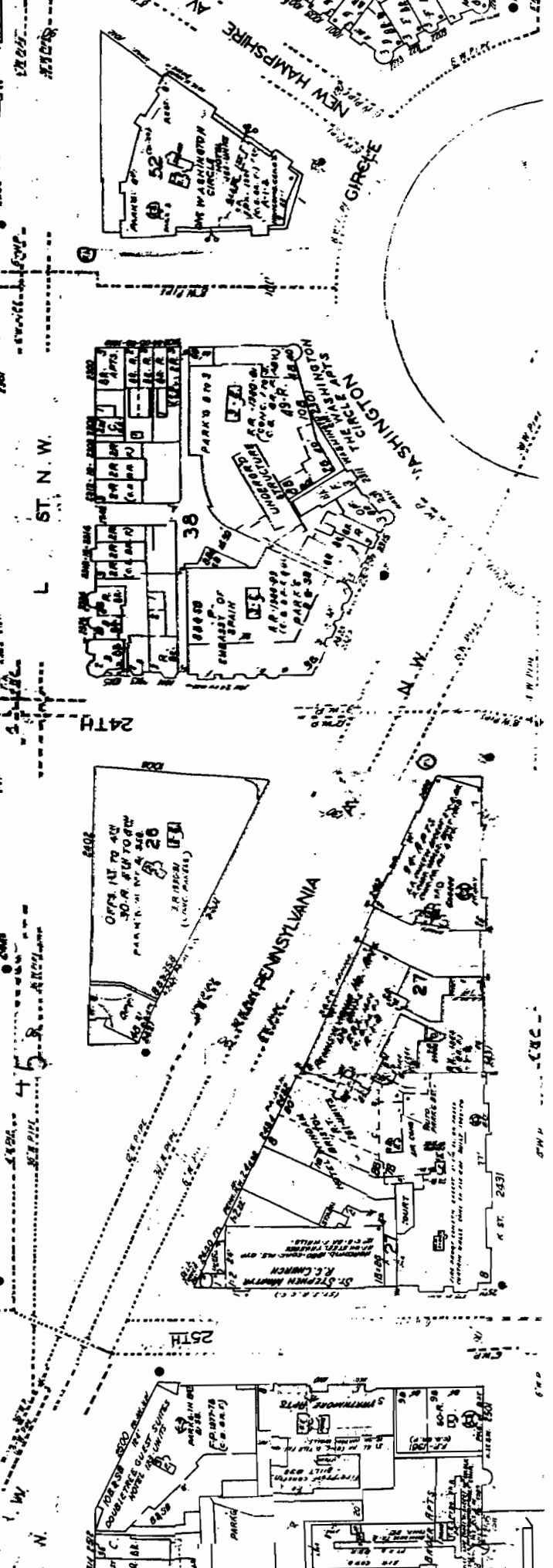
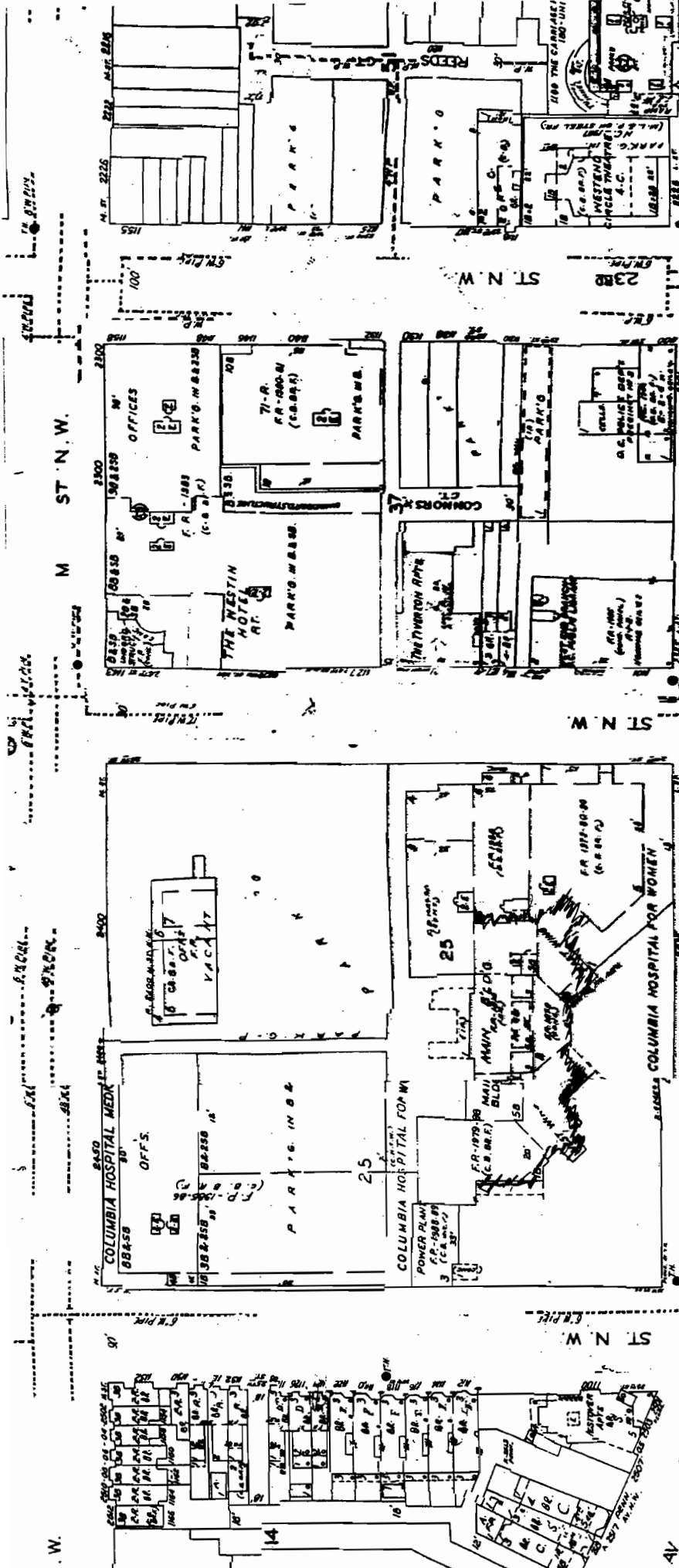
Evening Star, October 4, 1957

Foggy Bottom News; 2425 L Street, NW; January 1979

Washington Post, May 19, 2002; May 10, 2002; November 1931; June 15, 1916

**Map**

District of Columbia Plat of Square 25 and surrounding Squares.



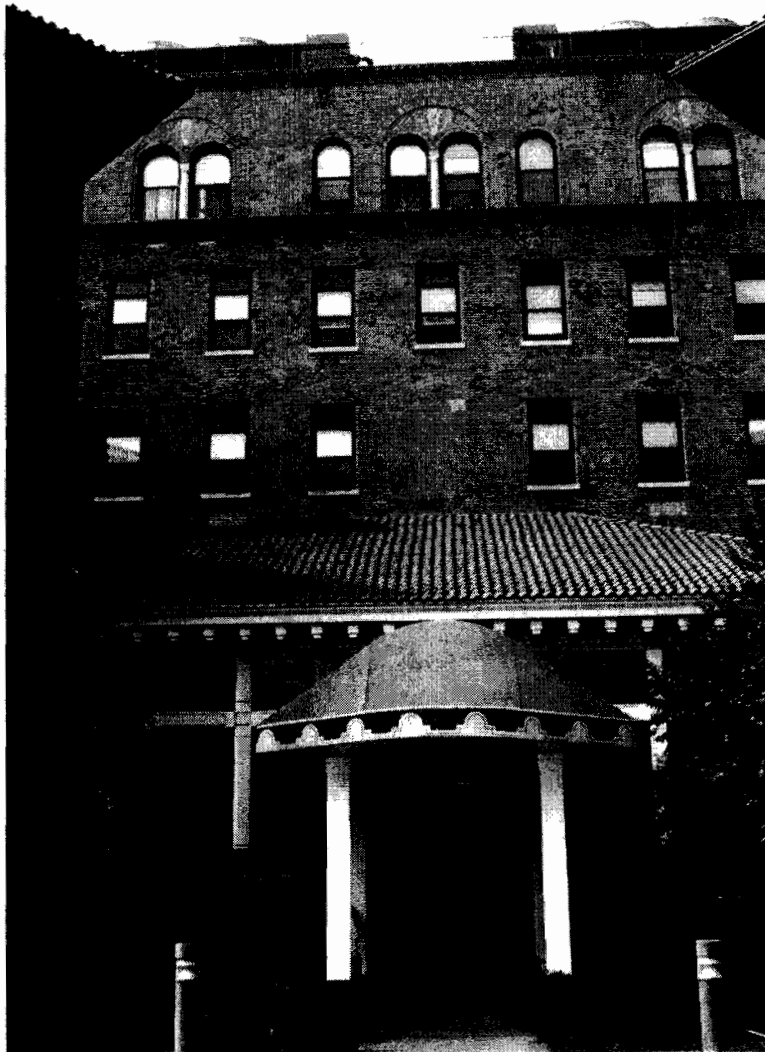


**Columbia Hospital for Women from St. Stephen Martyr Church rectory across  
Pennsylvania Avenue and L Street, NW**





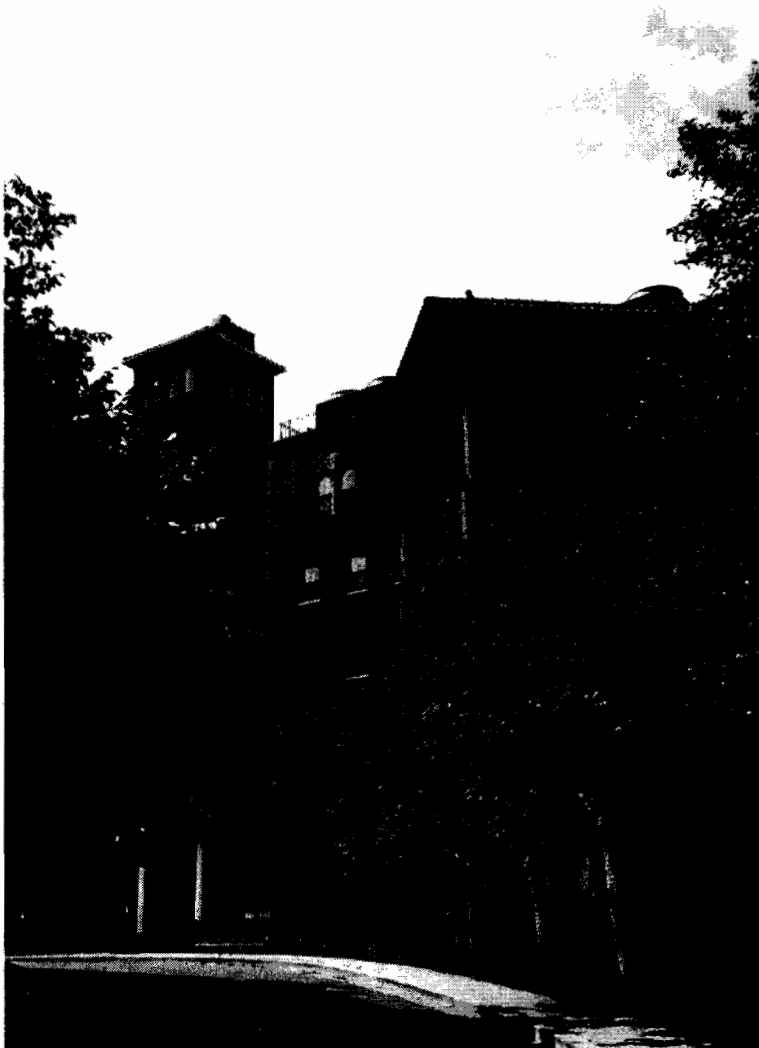
**Detail of central structure top floor windows with tile medallion**



**Central structure facade**



**Upper floors of Columbia Hospital for Women, L Street façade**



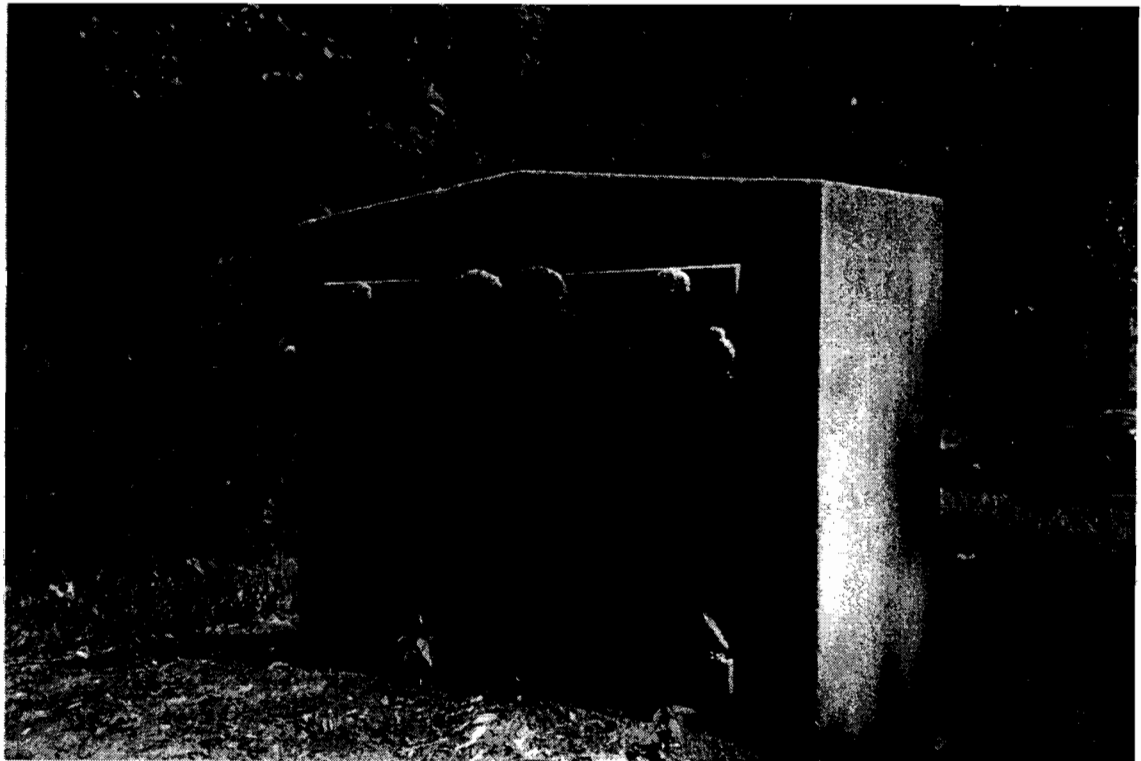
**West tower  
Central facade  
East wing**



**East side of west wing tower**



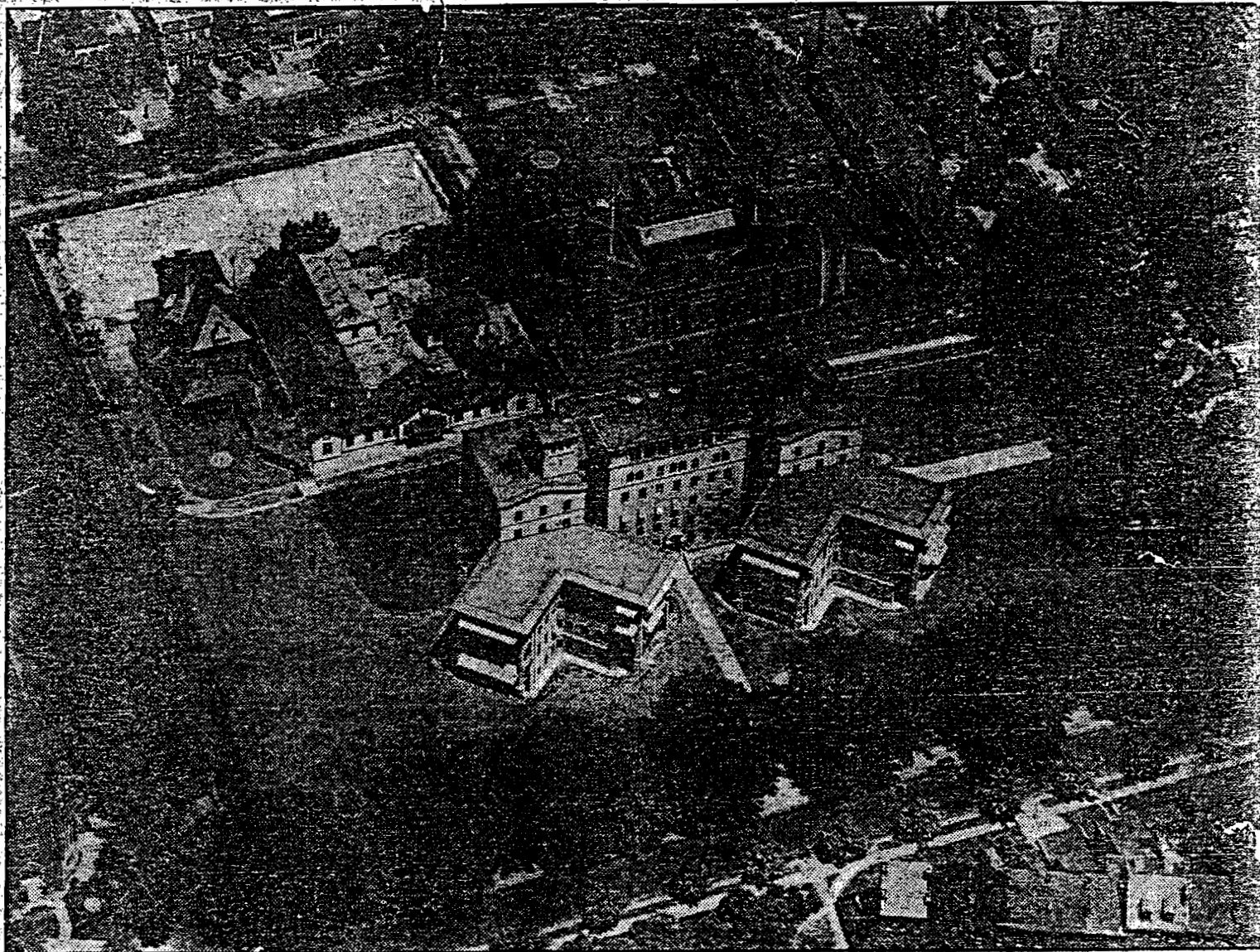
**West side and tower  
of east wing**



**Monument commemorating Rush-Bagot Agreement  
Benjamin Johnson, Sculptor, 1935  
Facing front door of Columbia Hospital for Women**

# Skyviews of Washington, No. 10

NOV. 1931



**S**TORK'S-EYE view of Columbia Hospital for Women, where a certain percentage of Washington's population first saw the light of day.

The hospital, known for its modern maternity wards and one of the best obstetrical staffs in the city, is the five-story structure with the Y-

shaped wings shown in the foreground.

Just above it is the Weather Bureau, where Bureau Chief Charles F. Marvin and his corps of expert forecasters and meteorologists each day manufacture that particular brand of weather the community does or does not want.

Running at an angle across the top of the picture is M street northwest and across the lower section, fringed with shade trees, L street. Completing the square is Twenty-fifth street on the left and Twenty-fourth street on the right.

The large apartment house on the

right side of Twenty-fourth street is the Landmore. In the lower left-hand corner the roofs of row houses fronting on Pennsylvania avenue are visible.

Tomorrow—Sixteenth street north west, in the vicinity of New Hampshire avenue.

Fairchild Aerial Surveys, Inc.



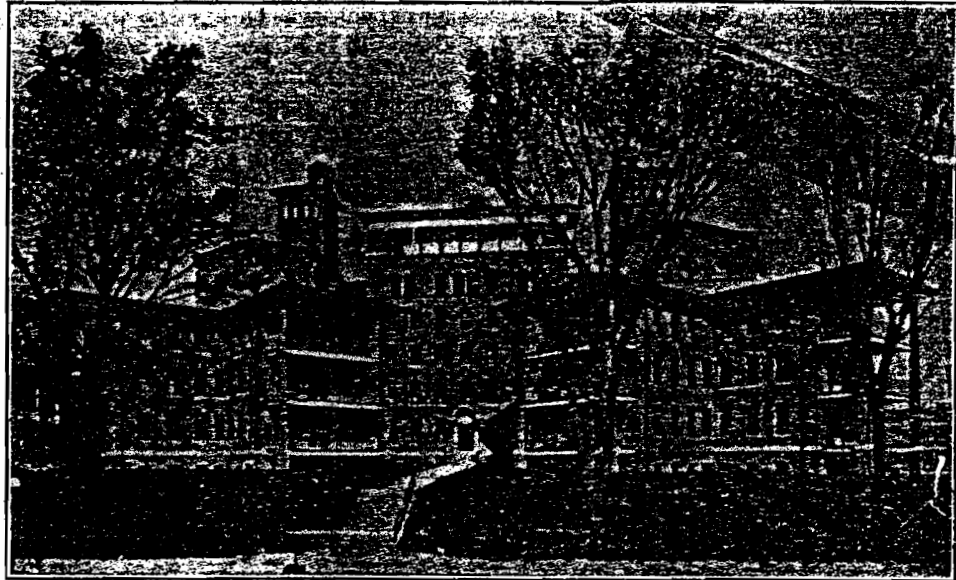
Columbia Am. Journal of Nursing Feb. 1934

### A Historic Hospital

ADDA M. LAWSON, R.N.

**I**N 1865 the less well-to-do women of Washington in need of hospitalization were admitted to Providence Hospital—if room could be found—or they went to the almshouse. There

We are indebted to Dr. Thompson for many interesting side-lights on the conditions of those times. The harrowing experiences of women delivered in the public parks, in police stations, and



COLUMBIA HOSPITAL FOR WOMEN AND LYING-IN ASYLUM, WASHINGTON, D. C.

was no alternative. The Sisters of Charity, though uncomplaining, found their energies severely taxed and quite unequal to the task an all-unconscious citizenry imposed upon them.

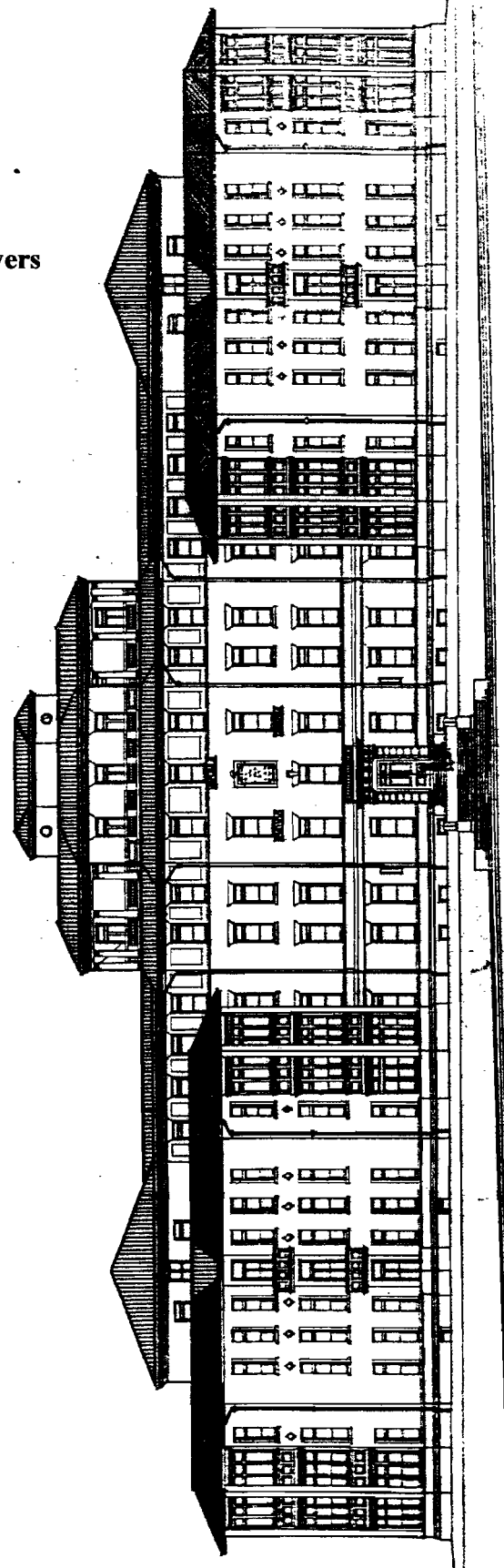
Full credit must be given Dr. J. Harry Thompson for the publicity and agitation which eventuated in the creation, through subscription donations, of a fund with which to open and operate a gynecological and lying-in hospital. This institution, in the words of its founders, was to be "non-sectarian in character and open to all, without reference to color." As the movement progressed, Dr. C. H. Hall and the Reverend A. D. Gillette each contributed to the success of the undertaking.

of one mother who gave birth to her offspring on the steps of the State, War, and Navy Building are particularly gripping and are fully chronicled in his writings.

Early in 1866 it was decided to open the hospital and, accordingly, arrangements were made to occupy the old Hill mansion at the corner of Fourteenth Street and Massachusetts Avenue, northwest. It was found, however, that the funds in hand did not permit of the purchase of the necessary beds. Thereupon Dr. Hall visited Secretary of War Stanton and acquainted him with their problem. Despite the unkind references historians have made to Secretary Stanton he was not with-

CHS 8017  
247th & SFS.,  
NW

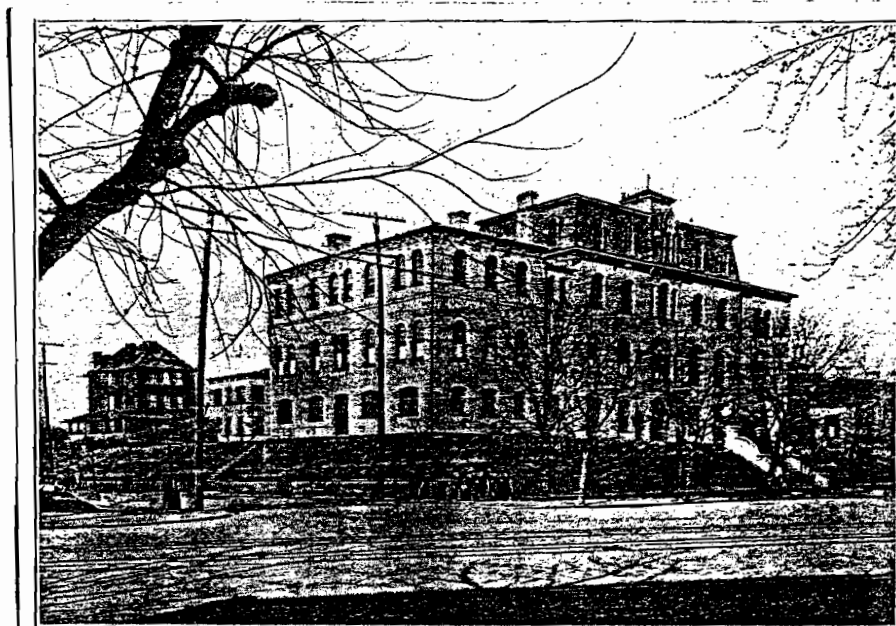
Early plan without towers



- FRONT - ELEVATION - COLUMBIA - HOSPITAL - FOR - WOMEN -

House Doc. No. 7117 43d Cong. 1st Sess.

Hospitals  
Columbia  
1860-1929



Nurses' Home.

COLUMBIA HOSPITAL FOR WOMEN AND LYING-IN ASYLUM.

Pavilion.

**Maynard mansion**