

WOODLEY PARK

STATEMENT OF DR. CYNTHIA R. FIELD
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Woodley Park is a neighborhood of unusual consistency. Today, as in the past, Woodley Park consists entirely of attached houses and the services which attend them. Planned as a place for townhouse development, the rows of units stand today their architectural unity overlaid with a slightly later grid of apartment buildings similar in their tasteful articulation of classical design elements.

The typically early twentieth century interpretation of style characterizes design throughout out Woodley Park. So too does the Englishness of the design criteria. From the early houses on Woodley Place with their Jacobean details to rows of houses marching up 27th , 28th and 29th streets with faint echoes of the Adams style, the rage for any thing English pervaded Woodley Park. This choice only underlines the conscious choice for Woodley Park to be a place of contiguous units as this type of architectural articulation-that is, the rowhouse neighborhood-has been most associated with English town planning.

Woodley Park flowered in a period of enthusiasm for things British, a period of taste for the British invention of the townhouse neighborhood. The visual characteristic of this sort of development was the unity of the overall composition. All of the pieces of the composition, the townscape were not individually important; they were important rather as contributors to the overall composition.

The stylistic character inherited from its British source was a subdued, polite classicism marked by delicacy of scale and restraint of decorative detail. The absence of drama, the preference for restraint was admired in the Edwardian style then current in contemporary England. Looking even further back both American and English townhouses of the early twentieth century were based in the early 19th century classicism of the Adams brothers, known in the United States as Federal style. In the Woodley Park houses, brick construction with decorative detail primarily around doors and windows and on inset panels were the stylistic characteristics which recall the English historic principles.

It was a moment in the history of this country which called forth the kind of development Woodley Park became; a moment of peace, prosperity, and confidence. With the emergence of the United States as a world power after the Spanish American War, Washington became a world capital. Much conscious effort went into design efforts to enhance Washington. The way of life too began to resemble more sophisticated world capitals such as London.

The commercial buildings share these characteristics. The popularity of the Connecticut Avenue corridor for prime housing soon attracted commercial usage as well. Small businesses serving the densely populated area. In the 1920's and 1930's a number of structures were built for small scale commercial use. In architectural vocabulary, the rule of classical taste and modest scale already set for the neighborhood were observed. These structures were generally one story only with delicate detail of a classical style around doors and over windows. Gradually townhouses once occupied by families were converted to commercial use especially on the first floor.

Woodley Park is a residential and commercial neighborhood with a rich mixture of 20th-century house forms, both urban and suburban. Originally platted in ca. 1875, Woodley Park was first designed to follow the path of Woodley Road as it rose from Rock Creek to Cathedral Avenue. It was the coming of Connecticut Avenue, however, which created the demand for development which brought this neighborhood into being. It became a neighborhood of characteristic rows of houses along quiet side streets all attached, as if to a spine, to the broad thoroughfare of Connecticut Avenue.