



STAFF REPORT

TO: HALRB
FROM: Rebecca Ballo, Historic Preservation Planner
DATE: November 14, 2013
SUBJECT: 3507 Columbia Pike, Arlington Presbyterian Church

Background

The Arlington Presbyterian Church, located at 3507 Columbia Pike, has been requested to be studied for local historic district designation by two Arlington County residents. Under the requirements of Section 11.2.4.A of the Arlington County Zoning Ordinance, the HALRB must make a preliminary determination that the property meets at least two of eleven ‘designation criteria.’ If the HALRB makes this finding, then a more detailed historic district designation report would be prepared for consideration by the HALRB at a future public hearing. The eleven designation criteria are below:

- 1) The property is listed or is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places;
- 2) The property has character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the county, state, or nation;
- 3) The property was the site of a significant local, state, or national event;
- 4) The property is associated with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the development of the county, state, or nation;
- 5) The property embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style valuable for the study of a period, type, or method of construction;
- 6) The property is identified as the work of a master builder, architect, or landscape architect;
- 7) The property embodies elements of design, detailing, materials, or craftsmanship that render it structurally or architecturally significant;
- 8) The property has a distinctive location, or singular physical characteristics that make it an established or familiar visual feature;
- 9) The property is a particularly fine or unique example of a utilitarian structure representing a period or style in the commercial, industrial, or agricultural development of the county, with a high level of historic integrity or architectural significance;
- 10) The property has the potential to yield information important to the prehistory or history of the county, state, or nation; or
- 11) The property is suitable for preservation or restoration.

The property is also called out in the 2005 Columbia Pike Initiative Revitalization Plan as a “noteworthy” historic property. Twenty-one such properties are identified in the plan. The plan text notes that “the community has also identified other noteworthy historic properties that contribute to the character and integrity of the Pike and should also be considered if, and when, these sites are redeveloped” (pg. 20). The Arlington Presbyterian Church was not identified for full building or facade preservation in the plan, though the noteworthy classification suggests that preservation is a consideration to be taken into account should redevelopment occur.

Staff has received considerable documentation on the history of both the Church and the congregation. That information is included in the attached documents. Staff has not yet analyzed all of the primary source documentation in order to verify all of the information; however, the newspaper articles, church histories, and other documents do contain a great deal of historical information that can provide a basis for the HALRB's initial determination of eligibility.

In addition, staff accessed the architectural survey documentation on this property from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. All the information below in italics is taken directly from the DSS (now called V-CRIS) forms submitted to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources in Richmond. Two surveys have been undertaken on this property. The first was conducted by EHT Tracerics in 1997; the second by PS Reed & Associates in 2010 as part of the Columbia Pike Multimodal Street Improvements Project.

Site and Architectural Description

This church, located at the northwest corner of S. Lincoln Street and Columbia Pike, is set back 50-60 feet from Columbia Pike on a level lot. Trees and bushes are scattered across the yard, and a large asphalt parking lot is located at the west edge of the lot.

Designed in the Colonial Revival style, the Arlington Presbyterian Church was constructed in three phases. The original section, dating from 1930, has walls of uncoursed stone and is covered with a front gable roof. The original portico has been enclosed with stone. In 1949, a new wing was constructed at the north end of the building. This wing, also of stone and covered with a gable roof, ran perpendicular to the original wing, creating an L-shaped plan. At that time, the original steeple which rose above the 1930 roof was removed, and a new stone steeple was constructed in the elbow of the "L." In 1961, the education building was erected at the rear of the church. This building, a large, 2-1/2-story, hipped roof building was clad in buff-colored brick laid in five-course American bond. Gable roof dormers pierce the north and east hips.

Congregational History and Building Expansion

At the turn of the 20th century, residents of Alcoa and Columbia [Pike] had to travel two miles north to the nearest Presbyterian church, the Ballston Presbyterian Church at the intersection of North Glebe Road and Wilson Boulevard. By 1906, Miles Munson had begun holding a Sunday School class in his home near Columbia Heights. That same year, "mission" church was established, although it was under the direction of the Ballston church. This mission church became known as the Arlington Presbyterian Church.

The first Arlington Presbyterian Church was constructed in 1909 on the north side of Columbia Pike about 200 feet west of Monroe Street. By 1919, a larger building was needed to house the growing congregation, and an addition to the 1909 building was constructed. On December 20, 1924, the original church was destroyed by fire.

It was on May 1, 1925 that the current site, located at the corner of Columbia Pike and Lincoln Street was acquired by the church. A prefabricated wooden building, known as "the Little Chapel," was erected and in use by the end of the year. In 1930, with a grant through the National Mission Board, a new building with room for almost 240 worshippers was designed and ground was broken on October 12, 1930.

By 1940, the population of Arlington had greatly increased, as had the congregation of the church. By 1946, membership had grown to 605 and three years later to 725. By 1945 the church



planning committee had decided that the church must be expanded. In March 1947 a sketch plan by McLeod and Ferrara, architects, was approved. It took two years to acquire the funding and to find a construction bid that the church could afford. In May 1949 a low bid of \$99,987 by Cowles Construction Company was accepted, and on June 26 ground was broken. On May 21, 1950 services were moved to the new building.

Membership continued to grow, and an education building was erected in 1960-61.

Known Figures Associated with the Church

The following information pertains to three known historical figures involved in the early creation and design of the current Arlington Presbyterian Church building. Church elders Walter Handy and Thomas DeLashmutt were prominent Arlington County residents, and were also instrumental in constructing the ‘new’ church in 1930. The life of the architect chosen to design the church, Adolph F. Thelander, has not been extensively researched, but preliminary information shows that he was active in Arlington County during the 1930s and 1940s.

Thomas DeLashmutt was one of the primary builders and developers in the southern portion of Arlington County during the 1930s and 1940s. The Barcroft Apartments complex, which DeLashmutt constructed and which remains in family ownership, is one of the largest and best-preserved and designed garden apartment complexes in the County. It is currently listed as an Essential Resource on the County’s Historic Resources Inventory and it is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Walter Handy, another noted elder of this church, was actively engaged in the civic affairs of Arlington County. One of his accomplishments was an appointment to the committee selected to choose a new name for the County after the separation from the City of Alexandria. Another of his accomplishments was bringing the first electrical lines to the Barcroft neighborhood.

“In 1912, driven by the efforts of Walter K. Handy and fourteen other residents, a petition was presented to the City of Arlington requesting that electric lines be extended from Columbia to Barcroft. Handy wired the first fourteen Barcroft houses, as well as the Barcroft School House, in 1913 for electricity. Accordingly, the Walter Ker Handy House (000-2256) at 4712 South 8th Street was one of the first houses to have electricity in Barcroft.” (Preliminary Information Form: Barcroft, Arlington County, VA; EHT Tracerics, Inc., April 2001; Page 8)

Adolph Thelander was hired as the architect by the Presbytery and designed the original church building that was constructed in 1930. Thelander also designed a number of single-family homes and garden apartments in the County, including houses in Country Club Hills (1928-29) and Westover (1938). (<http://library.arlingtonva.us/2011/08/18/homes-of-character/>; Westover National Register Nomination)

Summary

Sufficient historic documentation exists for the HALRB to draw some preliminary conclusions as to whether or not the Arlington Presbyterian Church meets at least two of the eleven designation criteria as stated in the Zoning Ordinance. A preliminary finding by the HALRB that the property may meet two of the criteria does not ensure historic district designation at this point, but it would allow for further research and documentation of the property.