

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Old Southwest Historic District

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Location

street & number Multiple locations roughly bounded by M St SW, South Capital St  
SW, Q St SW, Canal/2<sup>nd</sup> St SW


not for publication

city or town Washington, DC

vicinity

state \_\_\_\_\_ code \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ code \_\_\_\_\_ zip code 20024

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national       statewide       local

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register       determined eligible for the National Register

determined not eligible for the National Register       removed from the National Register

other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only **one** box.)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
210	33	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
210	33	<b>Total</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

2

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC / single dwelling

DOMESTIC / multiple dwelling

COMMERCE / specialty store

TRANSPORTATION / road-related (avenue layout)

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC / single dwelling

DOMESTIC / multiple dwelling

COMMERCE / specialty store

TRANSPORTATION / road-related (avenue layout)

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: \_\_\_\_\_

walls: \_\_\_\_\_

roof: \_\_\_\_\_

other: \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

#### **Summary Paragraph**

The Old Southwest Historic District is located in the Southwest quadrant of Washington, DC. The neighborhood area contains the only intact examples of working-class dwellings that characterized Southwest Washington before the urban renewal program of the 1950s and 1960s. The area reflects the developmental patterns of the Southwest quadrant of Washington and the city as a whole. The district is comprised largely of residential properties with some commercial and industrial properties. The district is roughly bounded by South Capitol, M, 2nd, and Q Streets SW. The residential properties include a wide variety of workers housing constructed between the late 19<sup>th</sup> and mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some of these properties were constructed by private individuals, however the majority of dwellings were constructed as part of public initiatives to clear alley houses and construct better housing for the working class. The period of significance for the Old Southwest Historic District spans 1892, the date of construction for the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Rowhouses located on South Capitol Street, to 1958, the date of construction for the Syphax Gardens Public Housing.

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### **Narrative Description**

#### **Setting and Streetscape**

The Old Southwest Historic District, containing approximately 55 acres, is laid out in a grid plan, with rectilinear streets and alleyways designed as part of Pierre L'Enfant's original plan for Washington, DC. The terrain is low lying and slopes gently towards the Anacostia River to the south. The district is made up of M through Q streets SW, running east to west, and South Capitol Street SW, Carrollsburg Place SW, Half Street SW, Howison Place SW, First Street SW, and Canal Street SW/Second Street SW, running north to south. Canal Street SW is the only diagonally laid street and is located on the site of the former Washington City Canal, which connected Tiber Creek to the "Eastern Branch" (now the Anacostia River) and operated from 1815 until 1877 when it was filled in and covered sewers were installed (UMD 89). Streets in the district are lined with mature trees.

The earliest housing still extant are working-class rowhouses which are located on narrow lots with shallow front and rear yards, which is commonly seen throughout the rest of Washington, DC. Alleyways run along the rear of the rowhouses some of which are paved in brick. Garden apartments and housing complexes such as the Tel-Court Cooperative and Syphax Garden Apartments break away from the narrow urban lots used for the rowhouses/sanitary housing. These apartments often feature shared courtyards which contribute to their atypical layout and plan. Sidewalks and alleyways around these apartment buildings are paved in concrete.

#### **Architecture**

Within the boundaries of the Old Southwest Historic District are approximately 379 primary buildings. The district consists almost entirely of residential architecture, built primarily between ca. 1892 and 1958. Residential properties are a combination of two-story, historic rowhouses and large, three-story historic residential complexes. Two churches and one former school (now a residential property) were constructed in the district in addition to five commercial properties. Of the 379 primary resources, 367 of them (97%) are designated contributing resources to the Old Southwest Historic District.

#### ***Residential Architecture***

Approximately 95% of the district is made up of residential architecture. The majority of dwellings are working class housing. Nearly all are vernacular in detail, either by design or through modifications since their construction. Dwellings may exhibit only subtle details resembling a particular style or several elements from different styles. In form, they

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embody either two-story, historic rowhouses or large, two or three-story, historic residential complexes. Several dwellings have no discernable style but exhibit subtle Victorian or Art Deco/Art Moderne details.

### *19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> C. Rowhouses*

Small groups of rowhouses were constructed throughout the neighborhood during the late 19th and early 20th centuries to meet the demand for working-class housing. Only a few remain extant today and serve as modest representations of the typical urban rowhouse seen at the turn of the century. One example is the set of 19th Century Rowhouses located 1307-1317 South Capitol Street, SW. This row of six, fourteen feet wide, two-story red brick rowhouses were constructed by the firm Coleman and Richards in 1892 to house the influx of workers in the area. The façade of each rowhouse is two bays wide with a window and door on the first floor and two windows on the second. The windows and doors are adorned with decorative double arches created by projecting and receding stretchers interspersed with headers and capped by an “eyebrow” of brick stretchers. Divisions between units are indicated by brackets located at the cornice line.<sup>1</sup>

Another extant example of working-class housing is the Weinig Rowhouses, a group of three rowhouses located at 1400-1404 First Street SW. Constructed in 1907, these sixteen-foot wide, two-story brick dwellings were designed by architect Julius Wenig and commissioned by German-American butcher John Schlorb. The Wenig Rowhouses are each three bays wide and feature one-over-one double hung windows (two on the first story and three on the second story). The windows and doors are topped with heavy rusticated stone lintels. Two of the windows on the first story and two on the second story feature one continuous lintel. The cornice features decorative dentils. With the exception of some replacement windows and small rear additions, the Wenig Rowhouses appear largely unchanged since their construction.<sup>2 3</sup>

The Simmons Rowhouses are a group of seven rowhouses located at 4-10 N Street SW, which were constructed in 1916 for working-class African Americans. They were designed by architect B. Stanley Simmons and owned by real estate developer, Charles E. Baines. Only twelve feet across, these simple two-story brick rowhouses are all two bays wide with a flat roof. The first story features a front entrance located right of center and a window located left of center. The second story features two windows vertically aligned with the first story fenestration. Minor material alterations have been made to the dwellings since their construction, however they retain their original character and design as well as their relationship to each other and to the street.<sup>4 5</sup>

The 1941 Marshall Rowhouses and Walker Rowhouses were both designed by prolific Washington apartment architect George T. Santmyers as working-class housing. The Marshall Rowhouses are located at five different locations on P Street SW, First Street SW, 2<sup>nd</sup> Street SW, and Q Street SW. They are two-story rowhouses with flat roofs and Flemish-bond brick exteriors. The two-bay wide dwellings are largely unadorned, but feature projecting concrete sills under all windows and a projecting concrete lintel above the front entrance. Two projecting brick bands are located above the second story window openings and wrap around all the elevations. Fewer of the Walker Rowhouses were constructed and are located at two locations along P and O Streets SW. They are also two-story rowhouses with flat roofs and Flemish-bond brick exteriors. The two-bay wide dwellings have one window and one door on the first story, and two rectangular window openings on the second story. The location of the front entrance alternates so on one unit it is located east of center and then west of center on the adjacent unit. All the window openings have a projecting brick sill. Many of the dwellings features front entry porches capped by a gable roof that shelters the front entrance and is shared with the adjacent unit. The rowhouses also feature a decorative brick band on the façades above the second-story windows. Both the Marshall Rowhouses and Walker Rowhouses have seen material alterations including replacement windows and doors

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<sup>1</sup> Cory Herrala, Renee S. Novak, Rosemary Faya Prola et.al, *The Old Southwest Historic Resource Documentation and Preservation Plan*, University of Maryland Historic Preservation Studio, Fall 2005, 67.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>3</sup> QED Associates, LLC, *Historical Context Study Southwest Washington, DC 1791-1973*. Prepared for the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly, 2014, 115.

<sup>4</sup> Herrala, 54.

<sup>5</sup> QED and Associates, 115.

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and the addition of air conditioning units. However, the massing and fenestration pattern of the dwellings remain largely unchanged.<sup>6</sup>

### *Early 20<sup>th</sup> C. Single Family Dwellings*

Few detached, single-family dwellings were constructed in the Old Southwest neighborhood, and today, two remain. One is a simple, vernacular frame dwelling, and the other is the brick, middle-class, National Register Listed James Dent Residence.

The house at 69 Q Street SW is a two-story frame dwelling constructed in 1905 by William E. Mooney a local carpenter. It was originally constructed as a detached home, but a two-story brick dwelling constructed in 1941 now adjoins the house on its west side. The dwelling is three-bays wide and capped by a flat roof. The façade features a protruding cornice with dentils and two interior brick chimneys pierce the roof, both are on the west side of the house, one near the front and one near the rear. Material alterations include replacement vinyl siding, replacement windows, and the addition/replacement of the front porch. However, no additions have been made to the building and the fenestration pattern appears original as does the cornice.<sup>7 8</sup>

The 1906 James Dent Residence is located at 156 Q Street SW. It was designed by architect William J. Palmer and was constructed by S.M. Maddox and Company for James Dent, a minister and community leader. The dwelling is a two-story brick house with Italianate-style elements. It is adorned with “double eyebrow courses of soldier bricks beneath a crescent of bricks laid endwise above each window aperture, a brick cornice band, and brick beltlines that run across the façade at the level of the first- and second-floor windowsills.”<sup>9</sup> It differs from the Old Southwest neighborhood’s surviving working-class dwellings through its more complex massing and decorative details.

### *Sanitary Housing/Washington Sanitary Improvement Company*

The Washington Sanitary Improvement Company (WSIC) was founded in 1897 through the efforts of the Civic Center, Board of Trade, the Central Relief Committee, and the Women’s Anthropological Society.<sup>10</sup> With its roots in the Progressive Movement, the WSIC sought to eradicate alley housing and “to supply to wage earners improved, wholesome homes at reasonable rents. . . . And to provide the very best accommodations from the stand point of hygiene, and, as to comfort, the utmost which a given cost will permit.”<sup>11</sup> During the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the WSIC and its successor Washington Sanitary Housing Company (WSHC) constructed sanitary housing throughout Washington, DC including in the Old Southwest Neighborhood. WSIC’s principal architect was prolific Washington architect Appleton P. Clark.

Located in the area between M Street, Half Street, N Street, and South Capitol Street, SW, the first Sanitary Housing was constructed in Southwest by Appleton P. Clark and WSIC in two phases: in 1909 and again in 1914. The Sanitary Housing is comprised of four rows of two-story brick rowhouses with flat roofs. Each row contains 29 identical units, and each unit contains two independent apartments, one on each floor. The exterior elevations feature Flemish-bond brick. The fenestration on the façade of each unit comprises two entrances and one window of the first story and two windows on the second story. Each entrance contains a rectangular door opening topped with a blind semi-circular brick arch. The first story window opening is topped with a brick segmental arch. A double band of protruding brick runs directly above the second story windows and a single brick belt course is located below the window sills. Each unit’s façade also features a “protruding cornice of tapering courses of brick.”<sup>12</sup> Divisions between units are indicated by brick pilasters

<sup>6</sup> Herrala, 75-78.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>8</sup> QED and Associates, 115.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>11</sup> George M. Kober, *The History and Development of the Housing Movement in the City of Washington, DC*. Washington, DC: Washington Sanitary Housing Companies, 1927, 21.

<sup>12</sup> QED and Associates, 116.

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located at the end of each unit. Pilasters begin at the edge of the roof (the top of the projected brick cornice) and end at the top of the second story windows. Rear elevations on each unit feature one rectangular door opening and a square window opening on both the first and second stories. These rear doors open to a covered wooden two-story porch allowing each apartment (upper and lower) access to the rear of the lot.<sup>13 14</sup>

The rowhouses located on Half Street and Carrollsburg Place have largely maintained integrity of material and design with the exception of the door openings. Units were once divided into two apartments, but many have now been joined into one dwelling. Therefore, the additional entrance on many of the units has either been completely infilled with brick or converted into windows. Other common alterations include replacement windows and partially enclosed back porches. According to the 2005 studio report completed by Historic Preservation students at the University of Maryland, the 1914 rowhouses once located on South Capitol street have been demolished with the exception of one unit located on the corner of South Capitol and N Streets SW. This unit (7 N Street was converted into a commercial property around 1920).<sup>15 16</sup>

The Kober-Sternberg Courts (now known as the St. James Mutual Homes complex), was designed by Appleton P. Clark Jr. and constructed by WSIC in 1937 and 1939. The buildings were meant to provide housing for persons of moderate income and were built towards the end of the “sanitary” housing movement. Sternberg Court, constructed in 1937 comprises Square 547, along 3<sup>rd</sup>, O, and P streets. The housing complex consists of five, two-story, multi-unit red-brick buildings. The buildings were constructed in the Colonial Revival style and are arranged around a landscaped interior courtyard. The façade of each building features three symmetrically arranged entrances. The central entrance is topped by an arched pediment. In 1939, Kober Court (sometimes referred to as Sternberg Courts Annex) was constructed on the north side of O Street across from Sternberg Court. These three, brick three-story Colonial Revival style buildings are arranged around a central court and feature tired brick rear porches, some of which are double-depth and serve as sleeping porches.<sup>17 18</sup> They have remained largely unaltered since their construction, with the exception of some new windows and doors.

Additional sanitary housing was constructed in the Old Southwest neighborhood in 1939. The sanitary housing, now known as the Tel-Court Cooperative Apartments are a blend of Art Deco and Art Moderne styles. Located along O and P Streets, the apartments were also designed by Appleton P. Clark and funded by the WSIC. The Tel-Court apartments are comprised of a combination of two and three-story, brick and concrete buildings. The buildings on O and P streets near the alleyways are three-stories tall and contain two separate but conjoined apartment blocks, each with nine units and an English basement. Those buildings located Half Street and O and P streets are two-story buildings that contain fewer units. All of the Tel-Court apartments feature decorative elements of both the Art Deco and Art Moderne styles. These elements can be seen in the bays of the façade, which are arranged in setbacks that emphasize their geometric form and the use of materials on the entrance and upper stories like terra-cotta quoins and lintels.<sup>19</sup> The Tel-Court apartments retain integrity of design, association, materials, workmanship, and location. They have remained intact and largely unaltered since their construction, with the exception of new windows.

*Alley Dwelling Authority/National Capital Housing Authority Projects*

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<sup>13</sup> Herrala, 37.

<sup>14</sup> QED and Associates, 18-19, 116.

<sup>15</sup> Herrala, 38.

<sup>16</sup> QED and Associates, 123.

<sup>17</sup> QED and Associates, 117.

<sup>18</sup> Kim Williams, *Historic Landmark Case No. 15-10: St. James Mutual Homes*. Washington DC: Historic Preservation Review Board 2015, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Herrala, 72.

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Despite earlier efforts to eradicate alley housing by organizations like the WSIC, this housing type had not fully disappeared by the time of the Great Depression. In 1934, the Alley Dwelling Authority (ADA), was established by executive order and soon after gained legislative authority. The ADA was a federal entity tasked with razing alley dwellings in the District. It was later renamed the National Capital Housing Authority Project and funded multiple projects throughout the Districts including the Old Southwest Neighborhood.

Constructed in 1942, by the Alley Dwelling Authority, James Creek Housing was designed by Albert Cassell the prolific African-American architect whose work shaped Howard University's campus and many academic communities throughout the country. He also designed Mayfair Mansions, a landmark complex in Northeast Washington. The James Creek Housing complex is comprised of 27 two-story rowhouse/townhouse buildings with a total of 239 units. The townhouses are located on three different squares between M Street, Canal Street, First Street, O Street and Half Street, SW. The buildings were laid out according to each square's size and shape. These varying configurations create small alleys and open courtyards. The dwellings are constructed of concrete masonry with a brick exterior cladding. Façades of each unit feature a window and door opening on the first story and two window openings on the second story. Corner units feature side entrances instead of front entrances and originally had flat roofs, but many were later converted to gable roof to match the gable roofs on the middle units. Unit size varies from one-bedroom apartments to four- and five-bedroom townhouses.

Constructed from 1958 to 1960 as a project funded by the National Capital Housing Authority, which was the successor of the Alley Dwelling Authority, Syphax Gardens Public Housing was designed by well-known Washington architecture firm, Chatelain, Gauger & Nolan. The project remains an early example of public housing located in Southwest. The new housing complex was located just south and east of the redevelopment area and opened one year after the construction of Capitol Park, the first modernist building located in Southwest's urban renewal area.<sup>20</sup> Syphax Gardens is comprised of nine three-story brick buildings with one of three plan shapes: U, L, and I. The building façades are clad in Flemish-bond brick and capped by gabled roofs covered in asphalt shingles. Each building's symmetrical façade features a centrally positioned entrance with a green canopy and aluminum double hung windows. No significant alterations have been made to exterior of the apartments. However, most of the window and doorframes have been replaced multiple times.<sup>21</sup>

### *Commercial Architecture*

There are only five commercial properties located within the Old Southwest Historic District. The first commercial building located at 7 N Street SW was constructed by the Washington Sanitary Improvement Company in 1914 and was originally a two-story, residential duplex. The building now features a modern storefront on the first floor. According to the 2014 report by QED and Associates:

...city directory and Census records indicate that by 1920 Jennie Payne, a 40-year-old African-American woman, operated a lunchroom at this address, which was also her residence. The DC Permit Index indicates that the storefront was added after 1949.<sup>22</sup>

The second commercial building is a two-story masonry structure located at 1399 Half Street SW has undergone major alterations over the years. Today the building serves as a corner market with apartments on the second story. No building permit could be located, but maps and city directories show that the building originally bore the address 1341 Half Street SW and served as a blacksmith shop, cooperage, and wagon works during the 19th and early 20th centuries. In 1938 the building was largely gutted by fire and had to be reconstructed. According to research by QED and Associates,

Soon afterwards, its wagon-width doorways were partially converted to display windows, its masonry façade was stuccoed, and its upper floor was converted to flats. Although the building has been extensively altered, its cornice, and upper fenestration pattern still suggest a 19th-century structure.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> QED and Associates, 40.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>22</sup> QED and Associates, 78.

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The third commercial building is located at 1515 Half Street SW. Constructed in 1951, the one-story building was originally used as a garage and office space owned by Nathaniel Smith. The building features a one-story 1955 addition. The building is no longer a garage but is still used for commercial purposes and appears largely unchanged.

The fourth commercial building is a non-contributing structure located at 1546-1550 First Street SW. The one-story brick clad building serves as a convenience store and according to property records was constructed in 1962. The fifth commercial building is also a non-contributing structure located at 1301 South Capitol Street. It was constructed in 1966 as a liquor store and remains in that same use today.

### ***Institutional Architecture***

Three institutional buildings are located within the historic district boundaries. The first building is the Living Hope United Pentecostal Church of Washington DC located at 1200 Canal Street SW. The church was constructed in 1957 and was originally owned by the Second Baptist Church. The one-and-a-half-story front-gable church is covered in brick. Although constructed during the period of significance, the building appears to have undergone material alterations and additions that have compromised its integrity of design and materials.

The second institutional building is the Carron Baptist Church located at 1354 First Street SW. The church was constructed in 1898 and was originally owned by the African-American Rehoboth Baptist Church. The church is a vernacular blend of early-20th century Victorian Gothic and Romanesque Revival style architecture, with a few Gothic Revival traits. It was constructed with a modest nave and transept floor plan. Formstone was applied to the exterior of the church sometime after 1950 and now covers the original red brick exterior. Despite this material alteration, the church retains integrity of design, association, materials, and location. The original brick church remains intact underneath mid-20<sup>th</sup> century exterior addition of formstone, which is itself historic. Formstone was a commonly used decorative element during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and illustrates the evolution of the church over several decades and generations of pastorate.<sup>24</sup>

The third institutional building is the National Register listed William Syphax School located at 1322 Half Street SW. The Colonial Revival style school was designed and built by architecture firm Marsh & Peter and opened in 1901 as a school for African American children in the southwest neighborhood. The historic core of the school rises two-and-a-half stories and is capped by a hipped roof covered in asphalt shingles. The brick school features three pavilions, the central of which is recessed at the front and rear and two chimneys pierce the roof. The façade is nine-bays wide and features wood, metal, terracotta, and limestone details. The main entrance features a limestone surround adorned with Doric pilasters on either side of the entrance and topped by a triangular pediment. Directly above the entrance is a Palladian window with a balcony and iron railing. Additions were made to the building in 1941 and 1953. The school closed in the 1980s and was converted into condominiums in 1999. During the conversion, the 1953 addition and part of the 1941 addition were demolished and replaced with 29 townhomes.

### **Condition and Integrity**

The Old Southwest Historic District contains a high degree of integrity, particularly in the areas of location, feeling, association, and design. Many of the buildings exhibit a loss of architectural details, new roofing and fenestration, and may have altered porches or small additions. However, while the early buildings may not all retain significant integrity of materials and workmanship, most have retained their original form and evidence of their character-defining features. Only ten (3%) of the primary buildings in the district were constructed after 1958. The retention of original building stock and streetscapes contributes to the overall feeling and association of the district as a working-class neighborhood.

## **INVENTORY**

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 123.

<sup>24</sup> Herrala, 46.



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### **Organization and Labeling of the Inventory**

Resources are listed numerically by street address and streets are listed in alphabetical order. Each building is assigned contributing or non-contributing status based on their level of integrity and whether they were constructed within the period of significance. The period of significance extends from 1892, the date of construction for the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Rowhouses located on South Capitol Street, to 1958, the date of construction for the Syphax Gardens Public Housing.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Community Planning and Development

Architecture

**Period of Significance**

1892-1958

**Significant Dates**

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Appleton P. Clark

Marsh & Peter

Chatelain, Gauger & Nolan

Albert Cassell

George T. Santmyers

William J. Palmer

Coleman and Richards

Charles E. Baines

Julius Wenig

**Period of Significance (justification)**

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The period of significance extends from 1892, the date of construction for the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Rowhouses located on South Capitol Street, to 1958, the date of construction for the Syphax Gardens Public Housing. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Rowhouses on South Capitol Street are the oldest remaining examples of working-class housing in Old Southwest. The Syphax Gardens Public Housing are the last working-class housing project constructed prior to the large-scale urban renewal completed in the District including a large portion of the Southwest quadrant. Buildings constructed after 1958 either do not contribute to the significance of the district as a working-class neighborhood or are less than 50 years old.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

None

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Old Southwest Historic District embodies the developmental patterns of the Southwest quadrant of Washington and the city as a whole. The area contains the only intact examples of African-American working-class dwellings that characterized Southwest Washington before the urban renewal program of the 1950s and 1960s. The Old Southwest neighborhood provides insight into the evolution of Southwest Washington, including the rapid development of alley housing, the post-Civil War growth of the African American population, and the effects of increasing municipal and congressional regulation regarding the implementation of building codes and restrictions on alley housing after 1892.

The Old Southwest Historic District is significant under D.C. Designation Criterion B (History), National Register Criterion A in community planning and development, and under Criterion C for architecture. It is eligible for its for its “association with historical periods, social movements and patterns of growth,” namely for its role in the development of the Southwest quadrant and the construction of quality working-class housing. The Period of Significance spans the years 1892 to 1958. The beginning date of 1892 is the construction date of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Rowhouses on South Capitol Street. These rowhouses are the oldest remaining examples of working-class housing in Old Southwest. The end date of 1958 correlates to the construction of Syphax Gardens Public Housing, which was the last housing project constructed in the Old Southwest neighborhood. At the same time, the rest of the Southwest quadrant was in the middle of large-scale urban renewal programs which lasted through the 1960s, creating a modernist neighborhood dominated by middle-class housing and an urban waterfront focused on recreation subsequently changing the face of the quadrant.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

**Community Planning and Development**

The Old Southwest Historic District is significant in the area of community planning and development as an illustration of the evolution of Southwest Washington including the rapid development of alley housing, the post-Civil War growth of the African American population, and the effects of increasing municipal and congressional regulation regarding the implementation of building codes and restrictions on alley housing after 1892. The neighborhood is unique for its intact cross-section of working class housing and is a result of the development of housing reform in Washington, DC and throughout the country.

During the federal period efforts were made to attract an affluent population to the Southwest quadrant and establish a maritime port for the new capital city. Unfortunately, this vision of an affluent and bustling maritime port never came to fruition, and the Southwest quadrant remained largely unsettled until after the Civil War. At that time, Washington, DC experienced a huge influx of African-Americans migrating from the south. Many of these migrants settled the Southwest and resided in alley housing that filled the quadrant’s back streets.<sup>25</sup> Between 1860 and 1870, the black population of the

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<sup>25</sup> QED and Associates, 15.

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Southwest quadrant nearly quadrupled from 1,805 to 6,697, comprising almost 40 percent of the Southwest quadrant's population.<sup>26</sup>

The District's rapid population growth especially of the working poor, led to deteriorating living conditions and public health concerns. It was out of these concerns, that public and private movements to clear slums and construct better working-class housing was born. The Southwest quadrant was the site of many of these efforts, which became an important movement that changed the face of the Southwest quadrant and the District as a whole. Today the Old Southwest neighborhood features the only remaining examples of working-class and sanitary housing projects in the Southwest quadrant.

### **Architecture**

The Old Southwest Historic District possesses the only remaining intact examples of workers housing, sanitary housing, and government funded working-class housing projects in the Southwest quadrant. The remainder of the quadrant was greatly altered by urban renewal efforts during the 1950s and 1960s and further redevelopment efforts at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As such, the architecture of the Old Southwest Historic District represents a disappearing housing/architectural type. Its uniquely intact cross-section of working class housing gives the neighborhood the individual distinction necessary for listing in the National Register.

The Old Southwest Historic District's architecture illustrates the efforts of public and private movements to clear slums and "uplift" the poor. The architecture in the historic district was constructed using the ideals of what social and health reformers and urban planners believed were necessary to create a better life for the working poor. Despite the common goal of uplifting the poor, the housing differs visually and reflects changing architectural styles through the use of different decorative elements and materials.<sup>27</sup> Housing tends to be either two-story row houses, the result of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Washington Sanitary Improvement Company, or two or three-story complexes constructed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century by the Alley Dwelling Authority (later the National Capital Housing Authority). Many of the housing projects were designed by prolific Washington Architects.

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### **Developmental history/additional historic context information** (if appropriate)

#### **L'Enfant Plan and Federal City**

During the federal period efforts were made to attract an affluent population to the Southwest quadrant and establish a maritime port for the new capital city. Unfortunately, this vision of an affluent and bustling maritime port never came to fruition, and the Southwest quadrant remained largely unsettled. At the time, Southwest's largest private landowner was Notley Young who held the land from C Street south to the river where he lived in a plantation manor house. Congress acquired most of the remaining land in Southwest. In order to raise funds for the construction of public buildings and to encourage the development of the largely unsettled area, the government placed most of the land for sale.<sup>28</sup>

Many hoped the District would become a great national port providing water access to the interior states. George Washington worked towards this goal by organizing the Potomack Company, which was tasked with improving navigation up the Potomac into Pennsylvania. The project, eventually known as the C&O Canal, was not completed until 1850 by which time most interior trade went to Baltimore and New York City. Instead, the shores of Southwest Washington became an active local port that kept the city supplied with products such as produce, seafood, ice, wood, and coal. The port was developed with warehouses, storage yards, commercial businesses, and some houses.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Herralá, 25.

<sup>27</sup> QED And Associates, 24-25.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 9.

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The District's failure to become a national port, significantly reduced the pace of commercial and residential development in Southwest Washington. Development of the area occurred slowly, and newcomers largely settled along the Mall or the waterfront, leaving sparse development in between. The land in Southwest was cheap which enticed small manufacturing and commercial outfits including brickyards and tanneries. This industrial and commercial development was interspersed with working-class rowhouses and alley housing. Housing consisted of modest one or two-story dwellings meant for the growing population of working-class and poor residents.<sup>30</sup>

### **Social Reform – City Beautiful Movement & The Sanitarians**

“The introduction of the railroad and the impact of the Civil War caused significant population growth and development in the Nation’s Capital, previously a relatively unsettled area.”<sup>31</sup> With this population growth came a rise in poverty, especially in the Southwest quadrant, which drew African-Americans and European immigrants with the promise of work. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, deteriorating living conditions in Southwest caused concerns over public health and drew the attention and effort of social and health reformers.

Around this time, merchants in Southwest began to complain of an increased amount of sediment and shoaling along the river’s banks. Once lined with sandy beaches and lofty bluffs, the river banks were now lined by a series of mud flats and shoals created in part by the increased level of development in the area. As more and more people moved into the District, specifically Southwest, land was cleared for agriculture, roads, and building construction. These activities stripped away protective plant covering, leading to a leveling of the riverfront bluffs from the mouth of Tiber Creek to Buzzard Point.<sup>32</sup> Today the land near the waterfront is relatively flat. Adding to the damage inflicted by the sediment, was an increase in human and animal sewage. Until the rapid population growth during the post-Civil War era, sewers were rare in the District. “In general the movement of sewage operated by gravity and traveled from the relatively elevated northern parts of the city to the lower-lying southern portions.”<sup>33</sup> Due to this, Southwest received a large majority of the city’s waste run-off. None of it was disinfected or treated to remove solid matter and when it mixed with the mudflats and shoals, it created a noxious, disease-ridden combination, especially during the hot Washington summers. According to city health officials, residents in Southwest were at a higher risk of contracting malaria and other water-borne illnesses. Those who could afford to avoid the area did, leaving Southwest to the working-class and poor, many of which were African American or recent immigrants.<sup>34</sup> According to QED,

Crowded and odiferous back-alleys proliferated in Southwest and other quadrants as the city grew rapidly after the Civil War. Out of sight from the street, Washington’s poor and marginalized residents shared space with stables and small workshops, usually without benefit of running water, proper sanitation, or drains. Alley dwellings were especially common in Southwest, which received a steady influx of African-Americans from the South, who landed at the 7th Street wharf and took the trolley to nearby rooming houses or to family or friends.<sup>35</sup>

The segregation of housing by class and race was not unique to the District. This pattern was seen in urban areas throughout the country. In order to combat deteriorating conditions and the formation of slums, concerned social reformers founded the City Beautiful Movement. Inspired by the 1893 Chicago Worlds Fair (Columbian Exhibition), the City Beautiful Movement believed that thoughtful architecture and urban planning could uplift the poor and create a moral, healthy life. In Washington this led to the implementation of the McMillan Plan in 1901, which changed the face of the District. Senator James McMillan led the McMillan Commission and under his direction implemented multiple improvements throughout Washington, DC. Also known as the Park Improvement Commission of the District of

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>31</sup> Herrala, 24.

<sup>32</sup> QED and Associates, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 14.

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Columbia or the Senate Park Commission, the McMillian Commission sought to develop the monumental core and park system for the District. After a series of studies and plans, the Commission was comprised of architects Daniel Burnham and Charles McKim, landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, and Senator McMillian's chief aide Charles Moore<sup>36</sup>

Simultaneously, medical and healthcare professionals urged the public to pay greater attention to public health issues. According to QED,

The increased understanding of germ theory and its relationship with communicable diseases, poor diet, and the decayed urban environment of the poor led to a demand for more sanitary conditions in the slums. The Sanitarians, as they were called, focused on deleterious housing conditions for the poor, including overcrowding, filth, smoke from cooking and heating, the absence of adequate air and light, and the insufficiency of basic sanitation.<sup>37</sup>

Soon proponents of the City Beautiful Movement joined with the Sanitarians to focus on public health initiatives targeted towards the slums. The Washington Sanitary Improvement Company (WSIC) was founded in 1897 through the efforts of the Civic Center, Board of Trade, the Central Relief Committee, and the Women's Anthropological Society.<sup>38</sup> The WSIC sought to eradicate alley housing and "to supply to wage earners improved, wholesome homes at reasonable rents... And to provide the very best accommodations from the stand point of hygiene, and, as to comfort, the utmost which a given cost will permit".<sup>39</sup> During the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the WSIC constructed sanitary housing throughout Washington, DC including in the Old Southwest Neighborhood.

### **Governmental Reform – The New Deal & The Alley Dwelling Authority**

It was not only private citizens and companies working to solve the issue of slums. During the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the government passed regulations and established programs to clear slums and enlarge the country's stock of sound housing. The first step in this process occurred in 1914 when Congress passed laws to ban alley housing in the District by 1918. Unfortunately, a decade later, the country was plunged into the Great Depression, which only worsened the problem of alley housing. In 1934, with the support of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, the Alley Dwelling Act was established by executive order and soon gained legislative authority. The Act declared alley dwellings illegal and set out to raze the worst areas and relocate/rehouse the inhabitants. To achieve this goal, Congress established the Alley Dwelling Authority (ADA) in 1938. The work of this organization marked the beginning of public housing programs in the District. Immediately after its formation, the ADA drafted plans to eradicate the city's slums by converting alleys into streets and demolishing current alley houses, replacing them with new low-income dwellings. The ADA was also responsible for constructing garages and other commercial buildings in the slum areas. One of the ADA's largest projects was the James Creek Housing located in Old Southwest.<sup>40</sup>

Along the way, the ADA faced many challenges. First, the ADA had issues securing adequate funding to cover the organization's ambitious plans. Then, the ADA faced harsh critics who were concerned with the number of families and people who would be displaced by the ADA's actions. The Alley Dwelling Act made no guarantee that new housing would be provided for residents once they vacated their alley dwellings. The fears were well founded as in many cases families never returned to their former neighborhoods. Lastly, during World War II, the country's priorities shifted away from slum clearance to defense and wartime activities taking funding and attention away from their efforts.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Frederick Guthrie and Antoinette J. Lee, *Worthy of the Nation: Washington, DC, from L'Enfant to the National Capital Planning Commission*, Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore 2006, 126.

<sup>37</sup> QED and Associates, 13.

<sup>38</sup> QED and Associates, 17.

<sup>39</sup> Kober 21.

<sup>40</sup> QED and Associates, 20-22.

<sup>41</sup> Herrala, 28.

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In 1943, the ADA became the National Capital Housing Authority (NCHA). By this time the Southwest Quadrant, including the Old Southwest Historic District, had undergone the clearing and replacement of alley housing for more than 30 years. The new housing was constructed using the ideals of what social and health reformers and urban planners believed were necessary to create a better life for the working poor. Despite the common goal of uplifting the poor, the housing differed visually and reflected changing architectural styles through the use of different decorative elements and materials.<sup>42</sup>

### **Urban Renewal and the New Southwest**

Repeated efforts at housing reform throughout the District and especially in the Southwest quadrant, culminated with the razing of some 600 acres in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Urban Renewal efforts in the quadrant involved the destruction of a large swath of Southwest's historical, social, and economic fabric, including a large quantity of working-class housing. The Old Southwest Historic District is the only portion of Southwest that retains any intact examples of the efforts made by WSIC and ADA.<sup>43</sup>

After World War II, cities across the country, including Washington, DC, suffered decaying neighborhoods and blighted downtowns as people and businesses fled to the rapidly growing suburbs surrounding these urban areas. Cities searched for more tax dollars to combat their dying neighborhoods and compete with the draw of suburban life. Many believed that the only solution was to clear the large swaths of blight to make way for new buildings with modern amenities including high-density housing and new office buildings. Between 1945 and 1952 Congress passed legislation that addressed the concept of urban renewal both nationally and within Washington specifically.<sup>44</sup>

In 1945, the District of Columbia Redevelopment Act was passed and established the five-member commission known as the District of Columbia Land Redevelopment Agency (RLA). The RLA was given the authority to acquire land via eminent domain, making its work and power extremely controversial. In 1949, the National Housing Act was passed and added to the locally targeted 1945 act. This act gave redevelopment authority to state and city governments. It also eliminated the 1:1 relationship between new housing and demolished housing a stipulation incorporated in the 1937 Wagner-Steagall Act, which opened the way for large-scale renewal projects. The 1949 National Capital Planning Act gave federal status to the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), which prior to this had been a line item in the District budget (under the title of National Capital Park and Planning Commission (NCPPC)).<sup>45</sup>

Between 1954 and 1959, a team including New York real estate developer, William Zeckendorf, architecture firm Webb & Knapp, and architects I.M. Pei and Harry Weese, developed a detailed renewal plan for Southwest. A large portion of the was designated as the redevelopment area and the quadrant became the perfect test case to introduce America to the modernist vision. According to QED the plan was,

a grand scheme, larger than anyone had expected. The Zeckendorf-Pei Plan incorporated such modern concepts as the superblock, the integration of green space into neighborhoods, distinct separation of commercial and residential zones, and a residential scheme that integrated mid-rise apartment buildings with town houses.<sup>46</sup>

By 1959, the NCPC stated that "owing to higher than expected land prices, low-income housing goals in the urban renewal zone could not be met."<sup>47</sup> No public housing was constructed in the redevelopment area. Instead, public housing

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<sup>42</sup> QED and Associates, 24-25.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 28-29.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>47</sup> QED and Associates, 73.

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projects were isolated to what is now Old Southwest, and the redevelopment area saw the construction of modernist complexes designed to bring in middle- and upper middle-class residents and displace the working-class.

The lofty modernist goals of the Zeckendorf-Pei Plan resulted in a bloated budget and constant delays. Despite this almost every architect, planner, and designer wanted a chance to be involved in the project. Construction continued through the late 1960s and left New Southwest completely unrecognizable. Old Southwest remained the only portion of the quadrant largely untouched, preserving a cross-section of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century working class housing and serving as a visual reminder of the evolution of housing reform throughout the District.

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### 9. Major Bibliographical References

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**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Guthiem, Frederick and Antoinette J. Lee. *Worthy of the Nation: Washington, DC, from L'Enfant to the National Capital Planning Commission*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.

Herrala, Cory et.al, *The Old Southwest Historic Resource Documentation and Preservation Plan*. University of Maryland Historic Preservation Studio, Fall 2005.

Kober, George M. *The History and Development of the Housing Movement in the City of Washington, DC*. Washington, DC: Washington Sanitary Housing Companies, 1927.

QED Associates, LLC. *Historical Context Study Southwest Washington, DC 1791-1973*. Prepared for the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly. Washington DC: 2014.

Williams, Kim. *Historic Landmark Case No. 15-10: St. James Mutual Homes*. Washington DC: Historic Preservation Review Board 2015.

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): \_\_\_\_\_

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## 10. Geographical Data

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**Acreage of Property** 55 acres  
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>18 S</u> Zone	<u>325454.12</u> Easting	<u>4304991.47</u> Northing	3	<u>18 S</u> Zone	<u>325702.60</u> Easting	<u>4304359.47</u> Northing
2	<u>18 S</u> Zone	<u>325308.33</u> Easting	<u>4304335.81</u> Northing	4	<u>18 S</u> Zone	<u>325715.83</u> Easting	<u>4304977.15</u> Northing

### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundaries of the Old Southwest Historic District are shown on the accompanying map. Contributing and non-contributing properties are identified, based on their level of integrity and whether they were constructed within the period of significance, spanning 1892-1958. Starting at the intersection of M Street SW and 1<sup>st</sup> Street SW, the boundary generally extends southward along the east side of 1<sup>st</sup> Street SW, Canal Street SW, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street SW. At Q Street the boundary extends eastward to encompass properties on both sides of the street until it reaches Half Street SW, where it turns northward to include properties along the west side of Half Street SW. At the intersection of Half Street SW and O Street SW, the boundary turns eastward and stretches to the intersection of O Street SW and South Capitol Street, where it turns northward to encompass the properties along the west side of South Capitol Street between O Street SW and M Street SW. At M Street SW, the boundary turns westward and includes the properties along the south side of M Street SW until it reaches the point of origin.

### Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The Old Southwest Historic District includes the entirety of the remaining working-class housing located in the Southwest quadrant. The boundaries focus on the residential portion of the neighborhood and exclude industrial buildings as well as the Urban Renewal and 21<sup>st</sup> century development located around the neighborhood.

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## 11. Form Prepared By

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name/title Caitlin Herrnstadt  
organization Johnson, Mirmiran & Thompson date \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number 1300 Situs Court, Suite 200 telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town Raleigh state NC zip code 27606  
e-mail cherrnstadt@jmt.com

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## Additional Documentation

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

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- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

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**Photographs:**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Old Southwest Historic District  
City or Vicinity: Washington, D.C.  
County: State: District of Columbia  
Photographer: Caitlin Herrstadt  
Date Photographed: June 20, 2018

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

- 1 of 7: View of 1<sup>st</sup> St SW at the intersection with O St SW, camera facing north.
- 2 of 7: View of James Creek Housing (61 O St SW) near the intersection of 1<sup>st</sup> and O streets, camera facing northeast.
- 3 of 7: View of N St SW at the intersection with 1<sup>st</sup> St SW, camera facing east.
- 4 of 7: View of James Creek Housing on Howison Pl SW, camera facing north.
- 5 of 7: View of Sanitary Housing on Carrollsburg Pl SW, camera facing north.
- 6 of 7: View of William Syphax School (1322 Half St SW), camera facing southeast.
- 7 of 7: View of O St SW between Half St SW and 1<sup>st</sup> St SW (Tel-Court Cooperative and James Creek Housing visible), camera facing west.

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**Property Owner:**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.