

M-NCPPC



MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARK AND PLANNING

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL  
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

8787 Georgia Avenue  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3760

January 2, 2004

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Gwen Wright, Historic Preservation Supervisor *GW*  
Historic Preservation Section, Countywide Planning  
Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning

FROM: Clare Lise Cavicchi, Historic Preservation Planner *CL*  
Historic Preservation Section, Countywide Planning  
Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning

SUBJECT: Evaluation for Addition to the *Locational Atlas*: #35-152, Sarah Loughborough  
Brown House, 5004 River Rd, Bethesda - Demolition Permit Pending

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Add the resource at 5004 River Rd, known as the Sarah Loughborough Brown House, to the *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites*.

**PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND**

On September 12, 2003, David Scribner, President of the Green Acres and Glen Cove Citizens Associations, requested the above referenced site be added to the *Locational Atlas*. The owner of the property, David Kelly, filed a demolition permit application on September 10, 2003 (Demolition Permit #318162). The 0.66-acre property was the subject of a preliminary plan of subdivision to create four lots (1-04005). A subdivision proposal was reviewed by the Development Review Committee on September 8, 2003.

The HPC reviewed this case at its September 24, 2003 meeting and unanimously recommended that the property be added to the *Locational Atlas*. The Commission feels that the house meets designation criteria 1a, 1d, 2 a and 2 c (see attached Historic Preservation Ordinance criteria.)

Following the HPC review, the property owner requested postponement of a Planning Board review. The owner committed to not pursue the issuance of the demolition permit until the historic designation issues were resolved.

Staff has met with the property owner and his attorney to discuss possible strategies for preserving the existing house. The property owner has proposed to move the existing house forward on the property and place it on an approximately 15,160 square foot lot fronting on River Road. The owner also has proposed to create two lots facing Greenway and to build two new houses. This would result in a three-lot subdivision, rather than the four-lot subdivision that was originally planned. The owner has consulted with a house moving company and believes it is viable to move the existing structure. It would be his intent to renovate the historic house and build a compatible addition on to it.

Staff feels that this could be a good solution. Although moving a historic building is typically only done as a last resort, in this case moving the building may be the most realistic way of assuring its preservation. The house would still have its historic orientation to River Road and, although the land associated with the structure would be decreased, the remaining 15,160 square foot lot would still be larger than other nearby lots and would remain a special and unique property in the neighborhood. In concept, staff would recommend in favor of the relocation plan described above.

However, it is important to note that the only issue on which the Planning Board must vote at this time is whether or not to add the resource to the *Locational Atlas*. If the Planning Board finds that the resource does not warrant inclusion on the *Locational Atlas*, then the demolition permit may be not be withheld and the property can be razed. If the Planning Board elects to add the resource to the *Locational Atlas*, then the demolition permit will be subject to the provisions of Chapter 24A-10 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance. As the Board may remember from the Canada Dry case, significant changes to an *Atlas* resource can be permitted under Chapter 24A-10, if the changes are determined to not significantly alter the historic resource such that future *Master Plan* evaluation would be precluded. Thus, it would be possible to implement the relocation plan for the building, as described above, after it is placed on the *Locational Atlas*.

## **DISCUSSION OF HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

This house had not been identified in previous surveys of the Bethesda area. Prior to this nomination, the Historic Preservation Section had no information on the house.

The nominator has prepared information about the house, its architecture, and its history. In summary:

The Sarah L. Brown House, circa 1908-12, is an outstanding example of high-style Academic Colonial Revival architecture. It is a rare example in the county of the Swedish-gambrel roofed houses that were built as part of the earliest wave of the Colonial Revival tradition. The singular aspect of the Swedish gambrel-roofed house is the gambrel roof with upper and lower slopes of about equal length, but a lower slope of unusually steep pitch. This particular style of roof was only found in the Middle Atlantic colonies.

The history of the house is tied to that of the Milton estate (*Master Plan* historic site #35/35). Milton was first acquired by the Loughborough family about 1820 when Nathan Loughborough, Comptroller of the US Treasury, bought the property. His grandson James inherited the land in 1869. After his death, his daughter Sarah L. Brown, inherited 5.8 acres of Milton. In the 1930s, developers subdivided most of the rest of the Milton

estate, creating the Green Acres subdivision. The Browns continued to own the property, reduced to one acre, until 1956. Thomas Riviere, whose family sold the property in March of this year, had owned the house since 1956.

The scale, material, and style of the house are highly representative of upper middle-class suburban architecture after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The front porch, wooden columns, stone lintels and wide chimney are all generous in proportions. Both Milton and the Sarah L. Brown House are built of Potomac River granite, a substantial, uncommon building material that is indigenous to the immediate area.

Based on the information in the nomination form, staff does feel that the resource has a great deal of architectural merit, meeting criteria 2 a and 2 c (see attached Historic Preservation Ordinance criteria). In addition, staff is convinced that the resource has historic significance, meeting criteria 1a, and 1d.

In terms of architecture, the dwelling not only represents an unusual and important variant on the Colonial Revival style, but it also exhibits a high level of architectural integrity. Original features include single and paired 6/1 wood sash, entrance door, and hardware. In addition, some operable louvered shutters remain in place. The asphalt cladding of the upper roof slope, in contrast to the shingle siding on the remaining slope, is readily reversible. Rear second-story casement windows were installed in a 1930s bathroom renovation, apparently by Sarah's son Francis Brown and his wife. This house has had virtually no changes or alterations since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

Staff also feels that the connection to the Loughborough family, one of the county's oldest and most distinguished families, adds to the historic importance of the building. In addition, this building is a reminder of the substantial "suburban cottages" built along River Road in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the southern part of Montgomery County was just becoming developed.

All in all, this is a unique building in Montgomery County that clearly reflects a sense of historic time and place. Although not previously known by county historians, it most certainly meets the criteria for addition to the *Locational Atlas* and probably for addition to the *Master Plan for Historic Preservation* as well.