

District of Columbia Office of Planning



May 10, 2017

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3F
4401-A Connecticut Avenue NW, Box 244
Washington, DC 20008-2322

Re: Historic Landmark Application #16-16
Ambassador Romuald Spasowski House
3101 Albemarle Street NW
Square 2041, part of Lot 839
Affected Advisory Neighborhood Commission: 3F

Dear Commissioners:

Enclosed is a copy of the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Review Board's decision to designate the property referenced above as a historic landmark in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites. Under the Board's Rules of Procedure, this decision becomes final when copies are mailed to the parties in the case. The property is now protected by the D.C. Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act of 1978.

Listing in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites provides recognition of properties significant to the historic and aesthetic heritage of the nation's capital, fosters civic pride in the accomplishments of the past, and assists in preserving important cultural assets for the education, pleasure and welfare of the people of the District of Columbia. The Review Board appreciates the role of Advisory Neighborhood Commission conveying the opinions of the community on this matter.

For additional information please call the Historic Preservation Office at (202) 442-8800.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Dennee', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tim Dennee
Landmarks Coordinator



DESIGNATION
Of the District of Columbia

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
In Historic Landmark Case No. 16-16

Ambassador Romuald Spasowski House
3101 Albemarle Street NW
Square 2041, part of Lot 839

The Historic Preservation Review Board, having held a public hearing on April 27, 2017 on an application for historic designation of the Romuald Spasowski House, 3101 Albemarle Street NW, designated the property a historic landmark to be entered into the DC Inventory of Historic Sites, with a period of significance extending from 1979 to 1981, the dates of occupancy by Polish Ambassador Romuald Spasowski until his dramatic defection. The Board also recommended forwarding the nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

Historic and Architectural Background

The dwelling at 3101 Albemarle Street NW is a stately two-story, central-passage-plan, Colonial Revival-style, stone house constructed in 1926 in the emerging suburban neighborhood of Forest Hills. Constructed for owners Howard and Katie Fulmer as a single-family dwelling, it sits high upon a hill on the north side of Albemarle Street, one block east of Connecticut Avenue and facing the trail entrance to the Soapstone Valley. In 1979, the house was purchased by the Polish government at the encouragement of then-ambassador Romuald Spasowski, a lifelong diplomat and member of the Communist Party of Poland, who was fulfilling his second tour of duty as ambassador to the United States.

When Spasowski arrived in Washington in 1978 for this second tour, his family occupied the “cramped suburban apartment” provided by the Polish government for previous ambassadors. Spasowski soon realized that the Polish chancery on 16th Street was essentially a “security espionage unit” where the servants and staff were reporting back to the KGB. Suffocated by Soviet surveillance and by their cramped quarters, the Spasowskis insisted that the Polish government provide an official residence for them. The government purchased the house at 3101 Albemarle Street, and for the next two years, it would serve as home to the Spasowskis, as well a “safe house” for them during the “Polish Crisis,” until the ambassador defected to the United States in 1981. The house was then vacant until 1988, but for the following two decades, it again served as the official Polish ambassador’s residence.

Once an ardent communist, Spasowski’s loyalty to the party had begun to waver even before his return to the United States, a sentiment that would become more entrenched with the rise of the Solidarity Movement, which Spasowski saw as symbolizing the best aspirations of the Polish people. As his loyalties continued to shift and Spasowski became concerned about his privacy and safety at the Polish Embassy building, the ambassador increasingly sought refuge at his

Albemarle Street residence. There Spasowski kept a safe for official and personal documents and met secretly with diplomats of western European countries to discuss the state of the Solidarity Movement and ways to aid the struggling Polish people.

In December 1981, as the Polish Crisis reached a head and President General Jaruzelski declared martial law in Poland, Romuald Spasowski defected to the United States, becoming the highest ranking diplomat to do so during the Cold War. The actual defection occurred on December 19, 1981, when Spasowski phoned the State Department from the home to request political asylum. Over the next several hours, the ambassador and his wife packed their belongings with District police and FBI agents standing guard around the residence, and then escorting them to a safe house. Three days later, President Ronald Reagan personally and officially granted the Spasowskis asylum, "welcoming them to America as genuine Polish patriots." Romuald Spasowski died in 1995. Since his death two films have been produced based on the story of the defection.

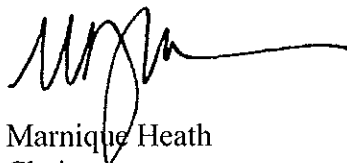
Evaluation

The Ambassador Romuald Spasowski House at 3101 Albemarle Street meets D.C. Designation Criterion A (events), as it was the site of events that contributed significantly to the heritage, culture and development of the District. In particular, the property was the scene of one of the most significant and dramatic diplomatic events in the history of the Cold War, when Polish Ambassador Romuald Spasowski defected to the United States from the home. Until that time, it house had been Spasowski's refuge from prying eyes.

The property also meets D.C. Criterion C (individuals) for its association with the lives of persons significant to the District of Columbia, namely that of Romuald Spasowski, a distinguished diplomat and member of the Polish Communist Party who applied for political asylum while in Washington, D.C. during his term as ambassador to the United States. Spasowski, whose defection provided the Reagan administration with a Cold War public relations victory, then worked with the Reagan and Bush administrations toward better conditions for the Polish people and improved political relations between the United States and Poland. In 1987, six years after his defection, Spasowski was present with President Reagan at the ceremony marking the end of U.S. sanctions against Poland.

The period of significance of the property is 1979 to 1981; the duration of the Spasowskis occupancy of the house.

For the reasons cited above, the property also meets National Register Criteria A and B, with politics and government as the areas of significance. The property also meets National Register Criterion Consideration G for exceptional significance, for its association with Romuald Spasowski and his defection, a person and an event of national and international import.



Marnique Heath
Chairman