



Living in Washington, D.C. Embassies photo

## **THE EMBASSY PRESENCE IN WASHINGTON, D.C.**

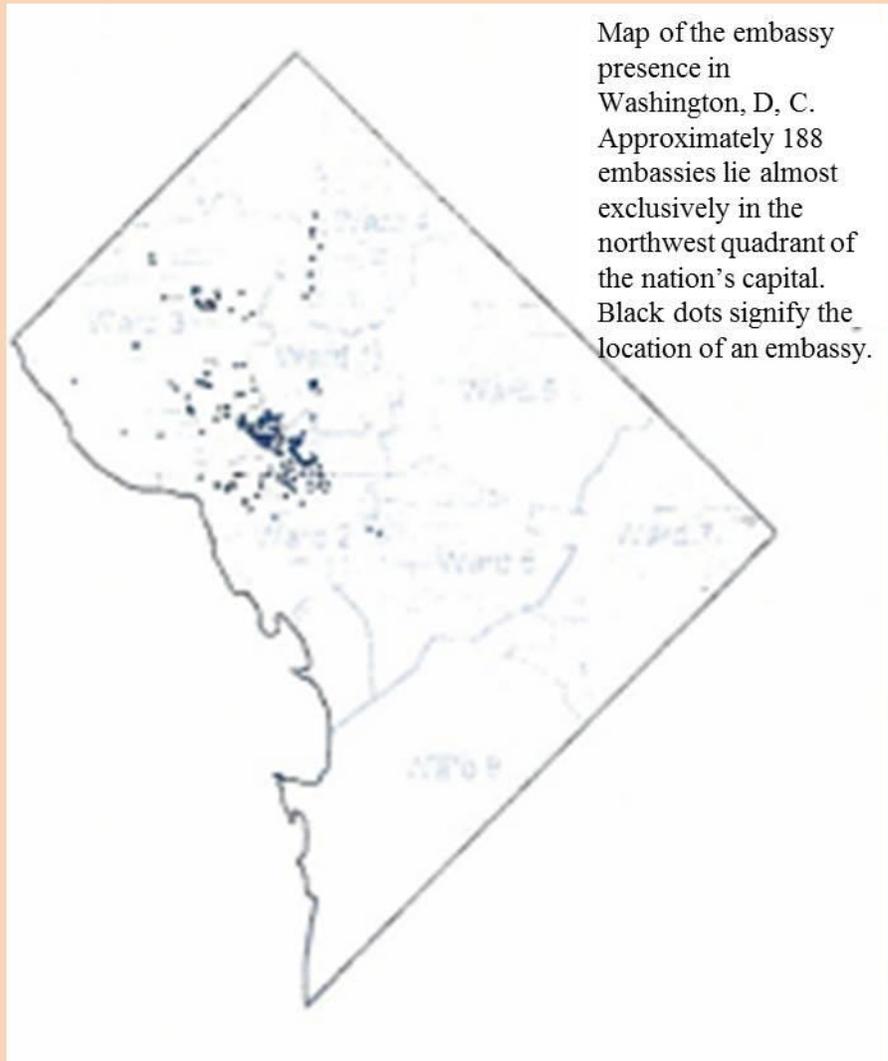
Priscilla R. Linn

May 29, 2014

Finding embassies on a map of Washington, D.C. is a relatively straightforward task. They lie in northwest quadrant of one of the smallest capitals in the world, often lining up along (or close to) the avenues that city planner Pierre L'Enfant drew up over 200 years ago. Other locations in Washington, D.C. could, in principle, welcome many foreign missions. Reasons for the concentration of embassies in Washington hinge on the need to be close to the White House, U.S. Department of State, Congress, and international organizations. Embassies also desire a location in a prestigious neighborhood that can enhance both national identity and standing among nations in the international community.

### *Essential diplomatic terms*

Since diplomacy often requires a specific vocabulary, this essay will clarify the meaning of several words used here. *The Diplomat's Dictionary* defines the word “embassy” as: “The residence of an ambassador.” The Dictionary states that in loose, contemporary usage, the word “embassy” also refers to the office building of the ambassador and his senior staff. For clarity, *this essay follows the “loose contemporary usage” for “embassy,”* and does not



Map of the embassy presence in Washington, D, C. Approximately 188 embassies lie almost exclusively in the northwest quadrant of the nation's capital. Black dots signify the location of an embassy.

Map from National Area Planning Commission report,  
Foreign Missions and International Organizations in Washington, D.C.  
[http://www.npc.gov/DocumentDepot/Publications/ForeignMissions/Foreign\\_Missions\\_Overview.pdf](http://www.npc.gov/DocumentDepot/Publications/ForeignMissions/Foreign_Missions_Overview.pdf)  
(accessed May 15, 2014)

include ambassadors' residences in the discussion. An embassy also encompasses the diplomatic corps that conducts foreign affairs from the embassy building. People refer to the embassy office building as a "chancery," where an ambassador and his principal staff conduct diplomatic business.

In the first 117 years as a nation, foreign governments did not work from embassies on U.S. soil, but rather occupied buildings called legations, which the *Diplomat's Dictionary* dismisses as "second-class" embassies. Legations conduct the diplomatic functions of an embassy, but with a lower status in the diplomatic world.<sup>1</sup>

Three other terms occur in this essay, "mission," "post" (which means the same as mission in this essay), and "consulate."

*The Diplomat's Dictionary* offers the definition of "mission" as "The permanent embassy . . . of a state resident in another state." A "consulate" is an office that one country sets up in a major city of another country. Consulates assist and protect their countries' citizens who travel, work, or study in that country, promote trade, issue passports to their own citizens and visas to citizens of the host country wishing to travel to the consulate's country.

An ambassador is the highest ranking diplomat sent to represent his or her country abroad. An ambassador is accredited through letters of authorization or credence to a foreign sovereign or organization and resides in the country to conduct diplomatic business through an embassy.

A minister, a position the United States favored in the early years of its diplomatic relations, is a rank just below that of ambassador. While an ambassador is the chief of an embassy, a minister can only be chief of a legation, which, as stated above, is a diplomatic post of lesser importance than that of an embassy.<sup>2</sup>

### *The role of embassies in international affairs*

Countries with far-reaching international connections need a physical presence on the soil of another nation for numerous reasons. Embassies (and consulates) enable diplomats to assist their citizens in a foreign land, cultivate contacts, negotiate, gather information, and handle any crises that develop. The personal touch is essential. As the esteemed newsman and diplomat Edward R. Murrow said, what's most important in diplomacy is "the last three feet," or the person-to-person contact.

For some countries, the embassy demonstrates the prestige of possessing super-power status. No matter what mantle of influence a country assumes, however, establishing an embassy exhibits willingness to be involved and participate in world affairs. Embassies provide a place for national leaders and diplomats to reinforce relations with allies and work on challenging relationships with adversaries. Embassies supply connections for business ventures to expand their markets internationally, leading to increased prosperity and more jobs at home.

The embassy may forge a connection with its host country, providing information to students, travelers, and people engaged in business. Embassies hold open houses, arts and cultural programs, participate in philanthropic and social welfare projects of the host country, volunteer with local schools, and partner with local institutions.

Embassies require more than ever before public rooms or spaces separated from private areas, enough offices, a kitchen for catering and dining space or canteen for staff, while the larger embassies need spaces for celebratory events like national days, balls, official visits, art exhibitions, or receptions. An auditorium offers a place for performances, lectures, public presentations, meetings, and other events. Today buildings should be as green as possible to operate, and include secure areas for cyber and personal safety.

Embassies also provide services to citizens from their own countries. Forms of assistance include help with lost passports, warnings and evacuations during political crises or natural disasters; monitoring the rights of persons in jail, facilitating birth papers or adoptions; or tending to the details of a death away from home. The embassy offers an important service when it adjudicates visas for travelers to its homeland, offering the first line of defense for citizens in the home country.

The buildings here exemplify three kinds of architectural chancery styles in Washington, D.C.; the one on the left (Republic of India) occupies a former mansion that changed its use as a building, which is described as repurposed. The one on the right (Federative Republic of Brazil) occupies an edifice designed and constructed as for a special use, or purpose-built structure. The embassy below, (Old Thai) also purpose-built, today serves as a Thai consulate rather than an embassy.



Embassy of India, 1885, acquired 1946,  
Embassy Row  
2107 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C.



Embassy of Brazil, 1971, renovated 2011,  
Embassy Row  
3006 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20008

The government of India has repurposed this landmark Washington, D.C. society home as a chancery, known historically as both as the Corcoran House and Depew House.

*Wikimedia AgnosticPreachersKid photo*

Brazilian modernist architect Olavo Redig de Campos designed the initial chancery, which underwent renovation in 2011.

*Wikimedia SimonP photo*



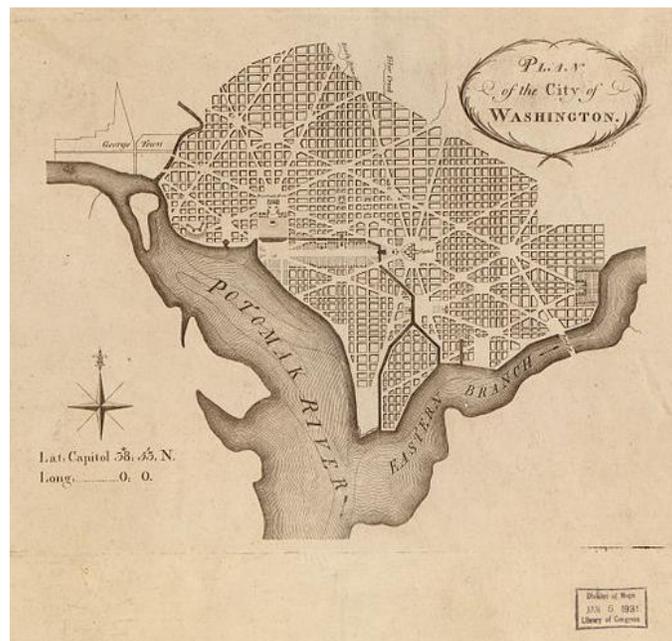
Old Thai Embassy, 1920  
Sheridan-Kalorama  
2300 Kalorama Road, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20008

Architect James Rush Marshall of the firm Hornblower and Marshall designed this structure as the first purpose-built embassy in the Sheridan-Kalorama district, and one of the earliest purpose-built chanceries in the city. Thai symbols on the front identify culturally specific occupants. After historic preservation groups expressed concern about its condition, today Thailand operates its consulate from this structure.

This essay encompasses several aspects of foreign missions in the Capital. Part I offers a broad overview of the embassy presence since the founding of Washington, D.C. in 1800, touching on the growth in the number and size of embassies, the buildings occupied, and the locations and/or clusters of embassies in the city neighborhoods as the city grew in both territory and population. Part II presents information about more current influences on embassy ability to secure desirable property in the city, including laws and commissions that have affected embassy presence. Part III focuses on the recent architectural styles of purpose-built embassies, and Part IV on the future of embassy planning in the city.

### *Embassy count in Washington, D.C. in 2014*

In 2014, the Office of the Chief of Protocol at the State Department cites a complement of 193 nations that conduct diplomacy with the United States, although the number can vary for numerous reasons. The greatest increase in number came after 1989, once the Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia divided into smaller states. The city accommodated an influx of twenty-one new embassies, most settling in former mansions in Northwest. Not all nations maintain an individual embassy building or compound in D.C. so that in 2014 the city contains some 188 chanceries within its limits.<sup>3</sup>



Plan of the City of Washington, 1792, Pierre Charles L'Enfant  
*Library of Congress image*

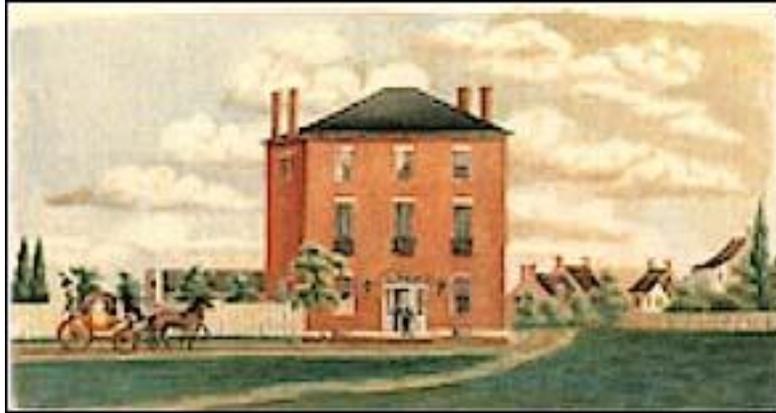
## **PART I: SUMMARY OVERVIEW**

### *Embassies in Washington City*

In 1800 the separate entities of Washington City, Georgetown, Washington County, and Alexandria (returned to Virginia in 1846), comprised contemporary Washington, D.C. Had the early planners achieved Pierre L'Enfant's 1791 vision of Washington City, embassies might be flanking the Mall today. L'Enfant actually referred to the buildings he envisioned for the Mall as "spacious houses and gardens, such as may accommodate foreign Ministers, etc." From this we do not know if he meant houses as "residences" or offices from which men would direct the foreign affairs for their countries. In modern language, however, these houses would be called "embassies," whether residences or offices.

Given the rough condition of city roads, those early foreign envoys—that are diplomats serving as special representatives of heads of state or governments—would have tried to locate quarters as close to the White House as possible. Unfortunately, the problem was not finding a place for them to live, but convincing them to live in Washington's demanding conditions at all.<sup>4</sup>

Although the early Federal government in the new city extended cordial invitations to France, England, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands the new government did not have great success in persuading diplomats to establish a presence on or near a Mall that was "a pestiferous, brambly eyesore . . . a miasmal bog." In 1800, Britain's second foreign minister to the United States, Sir Roger Liston, who lived in Philadelphia, was, by 1800, ready to return to Great Britain, having served at his posting since 1796. He, in turn, left his chargé d'affaires to manage diplomacy for King and country when he returned home. Only the Spanish ambassador remained in the new capital to conduct business with President John Adams—but he spent as much time as possible in Philadelphia or New York. The Dutch foreign minister lasted a year, fleeing life in Washington's frontier-like environment in 1802. His replacement only arrived 13 years later.<sup>5</sup>



Decatur House, 1818,  
*National Park Service image*

Later, in 1820, diplomats lived in Decatur House, located on Lafayette Square, opposite the White House. The eminent American architect Benjamin Latrobe originally designed the residence as a society gathering place for Admiral Stephen Decatur and his wife, Susan. After Decatur died in a duel, his wife rented out the house in order to support herself. Ministers of France (1820-1822), Russia (1822-1827), and Great Britain (1834-1835) occupied Decatur House along with others, including three U.S. Secretaries of State.<sup>6</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when land was less regulated, foreign missions moved fluidly around the city. Since the arrival of Anthony Merry, the first British minister who lived in Washington, D.C. from 1803-1806, this mission moved not only to Decatur house, but also, among other places, to 1525 H Street, NW, and to a new home on Connecticut Avenue, NW, in Dupont Circle in 1872. Italy changed offices thirteen times between 1881 and 1925. At this time, foreign missions in the United States were all legations.

During the years before the Civil War, Washington urban conditions demanded resiliency from those hardy enough to live here, similar to most major cities in the world at that time. That included foreign diplomats who, along with everyone else, had to contend with open sewers, rivers of mud in the streets when it rained, hot and humid air, and disease bred in wet marshlands.



Spectators wade through water at the Second Inaugural Address of Abraham Lincoln, March 4, 1865, showing the poor drainage and sewer conditions in Washington, D.C.  
*Library of Congress photo*

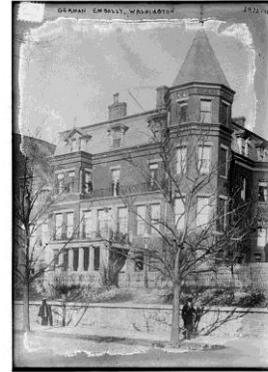
#### *Washington, D.C. expands*

Understanding something about the growth and development of certain neighborhoods in the District of Columbia during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries helps explain where embassies are concentrated today.

Congress passed the District of Columbia Organic of 1871, which consolidated the smaller pre-existing units of Georgetown, Washington City, and Washington County into one city—Washington, D.C. With that merger, local leaders began to implement important urban upgrades and the quality of life improved, as occurred in many cities in the United States during this time. Paved roads replaced muddy swaths, public vehicles traversed the streets, drainage and improved sewers reduced unpleasant odors and detoxified pestiferous marshes. The water became, fresher, cleaner, and relatively healthy to drink.<sup>7</sup>



Embassy of Germany c. 1910-1915  
1425-1439 Massachusetts Avenue,  
Washington, D.C.  
*Library of Congress photo*



Legation of Panama, c. 1920-1932  
New Hampshire Avenue at Q and 18<sup>th</sup> Streets  
Washington, D.C.  
*Library of Congress photo*



Embassy of Spain, 1911,  
1521 New Hampshire Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C.

An example of an embassy located in the Dupont Circle neighborhood.  
*Library of Congress photo*

The land speculators capitalized on the population expansion into new areas of Washington. These entrepreneurs created subdivisions and transformed empty lots into homes. Especially famous in the annals of Washington, D.C. history was Alexander Robey “Boss” Shepherd, a controversial civic leader who vigorously improved the city by completing much needed public works, concentrating on areas that attracted fine new homes and buildings for diplomatic missions. With this makeover, in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the nation’s capital became a city of choice for wealthy elites, who sought to elevate their status and take advantage of contacts in the world of business and politics.

At the same time, the British, Austro-Hungarian, Spanish, Swiss, and Chinese legations on Dupont Circle could measure their importance by upper class attendance at their elegant soirées, thus confirming they had chosen neighborhoods that would enhance their national status. People called Massachusetts Avenue around Scott Circle “Millionaire’s Mile,” as wealthy families built one mansion larger and more elaborate than the next.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Changing legations into embassies*

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, an important diplomatic conversion occurred that affected diplomats and the embassy presence in Washington, D.C. Through the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the United States did not recognize foreign ambassadors on its soil, since an ambassador “traditionally was the representative of a king.” Americans, proud of their republican status, sought diplomatic representation through ministers.

In 1893, however, the United States upgraded several of its most important diplomatic allies from minister to ambassador, which in turn elevated the associated missions from legations to embassies. These included the countries of Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy. Now envoys from these countries could serve as ambassadors in Washington, D.C. and direct foreign affairs from embassies. This transition took place gradually and continued until the late 1960s when nearly all foreign chiefs of mission finally held the rank of ambassador in Washington, D.C., and embassies rather than legations represented foreign diplomats.<sup>9</sup>

Taking the step to elevate important allies into full diplomatic status was an indication that the United States was beginning to assume a greater role in world affairs. This in turn attracted a greater embassy presence both in number of countries and buildings used for chanceries.



British Legation, 1872  
Embassy Row  
Connecticut Avenue and N Street  
Washington, D.C.

The purpose-built British legation at this location influenced the area to become the most exclusive residential sector of the city. It housed both offices and the minister's residence.

*Library of Congress photo*



Former Chancery of the Embassy of the Kingdoms of  
Great Britain and Northern Ireland  
Embassy Row  
3100 Massachusetts Ave., NW,  
Washington, D.C. 20008

Completed in 1931, architect Sir Edwin Lutyens designed the complex to resemble an English country manor. The embassy expanded in the 1950s, adding offices, and repurposing Lutyens' chancery into the ambassador's residence.

*Wikipedia AgnosticPreachersKid Photo*

City planning became a factor that would eventually affect the embassy presence in Washington, D.C. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, congressional and city leaders took inspiration from the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 and its associated City Beautiful movement. They also used the upcoming Washington, D.C. Centennial in 1900 to focus on increasing the aesthetic value of the nation's capital. Congressional committees formed, evolving into the Senate Parks Commission in 1901-1902, also called the McMillan plan after the commission's chairman Joseph McMillan. The Plan laid out the order of the placement of the city's buildings and monuments, the configuration of the Mall, and other important aesthetic aspects of urban design. While city development did not greatly affect embassies at this time, by mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century awareness of both the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans did affect zoning and embassy placement.<sup>10</sup>



Former Chinese Legation in Washington, D.C.  
1902, Dupont Circle  
2001 19<sup>th</sup> St NW. Washington, D.C.

Converted into luxury condominiums, 2014

In 1902 Waddy Wood, Washington, architect, drew the original plans for what was to become the Imperial Chinese Legation in fashionable Dupont Circle. The Georgian Revival masterpiece housed the mission until 1944.

<http://www.lifeatthetop.com/condo/chineseembassy> photo

As outlying areas of the city became fashionable and urbanized, foreign missions sought property beyond Dupont Circle. This largely came about as people flocked to the District after the Civil War in 1865. The growth of the Federal government at this time brought new agencies, jobs, scientific commissions, and confidence to the city. The urban population was settling beyond the city borders that Pierre L'Enfant had demarcated in 1791. Thus, in 1890, during the time that the affluent developed the most elegant neighborhoods, the city changed the name Boundary Street—once deemed the edge of the metropolis—to Florida Avenue, formally recognizing that many people had begun to settle beyond the previously established city limits.<sup>11</sup>

Transportation changed the city's demographic organization along with the expansion of upscale neighborhoods. Whereas once rich, poor, black, and white lived together; with the installation of the effective new horse car, and later streetcar systems, people were no longer constrained to live within walking distance of their employers. "Once people took this opportunity, the old pedestrian city—where people of all races, ethnic backgrounds, and economic levels had lived closely intermixed—began to separate into a city of different incomes and purposes." Wealthier individuals and families left the central part of the city, which was

unhealthy and crowded, for new suburbs along the streetcar and railroad lines. This tendency became more marked by the early 1900s. Water distribution in these expanding neighborhoods also favored the elite, as it had in the central areas of the city, and even as they changed neighborhoods, the wealthy received the freshest supplies. In this new demographic, foreign missions sought the best services the city offered.<sup>12</sup>

### *The spread of embassies*

The number of embassies increased in Washington in the 1900s as the U.S. extended diplomatic relations with more countries.



Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania, 1909, rented to diplomats until becoming an embassy in 1924 Adams Morgan  
622 16<sup>th</sup> St., NW  
Washington, DC, 20009

Architect George Oakley Totten, Jr. designed this mansion, which was purpose-built for diplomatic use. For decades it served as Lithuania's de facto government in exile.

Wikimedia <http://www.ltembassyus.org> photo

The embassy of one country, Lithuania, exemplified the hard realities of political fortune. The small Baltic country had maintained a mansion on 16<sup>th</sup> Street since the 1920s which served as an “embassy in exile” while the Soviet Union claimed its territory. With the breakup of the former Soviet Union, it became a fully functioning embassy in 1991—and remains so today<sup>13</sup>

## *Washington, D.C. neighborhoods with strong embassy presence*

### *Embassy hopes for 16<sup>th</sup> Street*

Mary Henderson, wife of Massachusetts Senator John Henderson, worked to create the first “Embassy Row” on 16<sup>th</sup> Street, which she briefly had renamed “Presidents [*sic*] Avenue.” Envisioning it as a grand, broad, and open entry to the city, flanked by villas, artistic homes, and beautiful expanses, she became an urban pioneer in 1888, pushing settlements north of Boundary Street. Between 1906 and 1927, Mrs. Henderson built some twelve mansions designed by architect George Oakley Totten, Jr., with the intent of diplomatic use. After World War I, as the United States gained "first-tier" status as world power, she realized that foreign governments were vying for superior accommodations in Washington, D.C. In the early 1920s, her determination to turn 16<sup>th</sup> Street into “Embassy Row” increased, and she encouraged foreign missions to purchase or lease the properties she had developed as chanceries or residences.

When newspapers in the 1920s referred to 16th Street as "Embassy Row," Mary Henderson appeared to have achieved her goal. A scrapbook at the Library of Congress from 1924 contains images of embassies in the 16<sup>th</sup> Street neighborhood, including China, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, and Russia.<sup>14</sup>

Today her mansions still serve as embassies for the Republics of Poland, Lithuania, and the Mexican Cultural Center (formerly the Embassy of the United Mexican States). No other time in Washington, D.C. history has one person manipulated wealth and social standing to develop an enclave of embassies. Despite her drive and large pocketbook, she could not compete with the enticement of real estate along Massachusetts Avenue, which overtook 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, and her dream in less than ten years.<sup>15</sup>

Some of the Embassies Located on 16<sup>th</sup> Street in the 1910s and 1920s



Embassy of France, c.1910-1926  
2400 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC

The setting on 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, reveals open spaces available for further chancery development.

*Library of Congress photo*



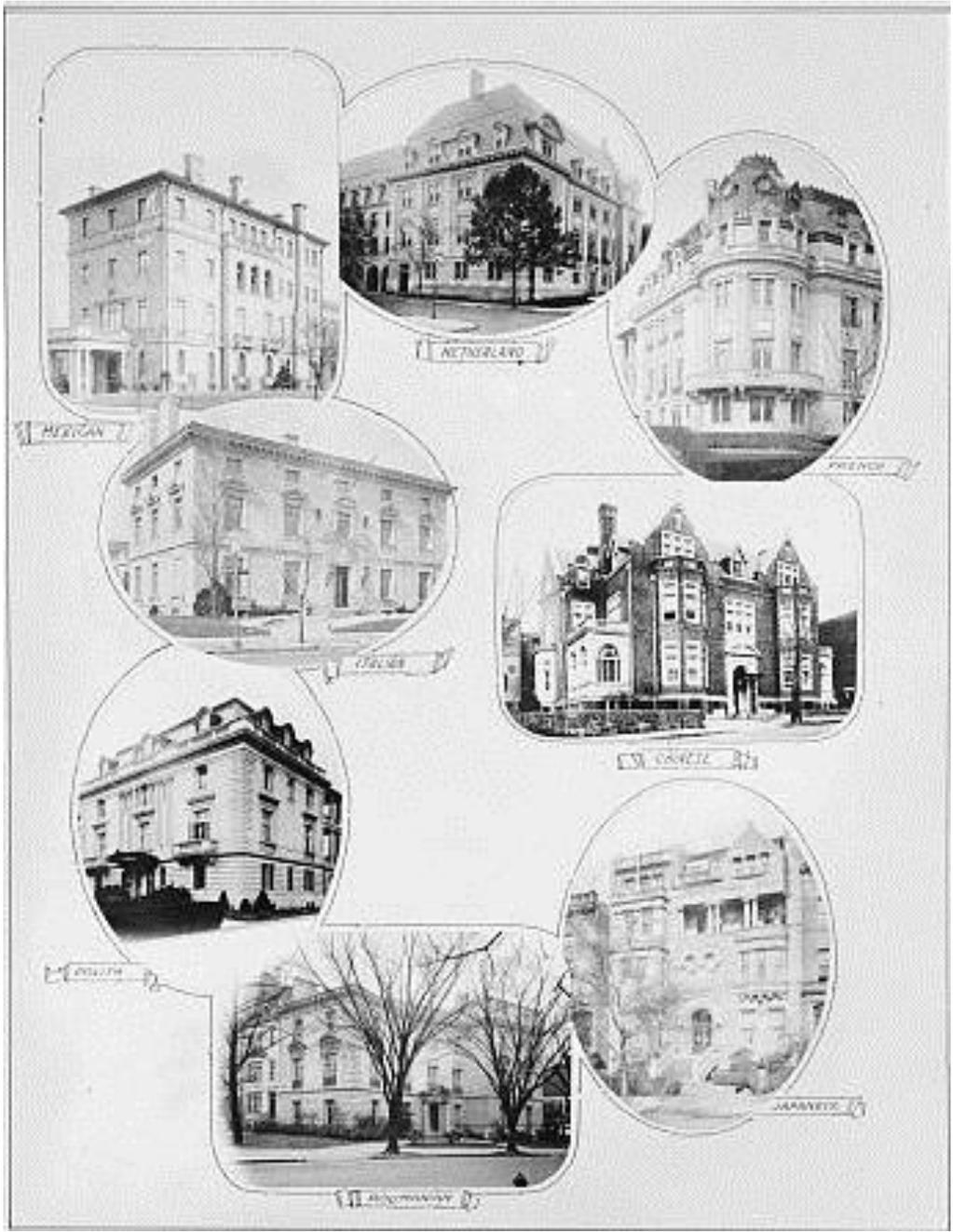
Embassy of Ecuador, 1921-1922  
1633 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC

*Library of Congress photo*



Embassy of Mexico, c.1937  
2829 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC

*Library of Congress photo*



Library of Congress scrapbook page with images of 16<sup>th</sup> St. corridor embassies, c. 1920

Embassy Row develops along Massachusetts Avenue, NW<sup>16</sup>

Massachusetts Avenue, NW eventually wrested the title “Embassy Row” from 16<sup>th</sup> Street when the British completed a multi-million dollar headquarters on four acres of land in 1931. British architect Sir Edwin Lutyens designed an edifice hailed by Members of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee as the “finest in the world.” When the British built it, the United States was looking for a comparable site in London to build an embassy with the same presence and importance as the one Luytens designed in the U.S.<sup>17</sup>

The address at that time was Massachusetts Avenue “extended,” indicating the Avenue would accommodate more foreign missions. Other embassies followed suit, no doubt inspired by Britain’s presence, seeking to “establish their footing in a stylish neighborhood.” As Washington expanded its diplomatic reach to more and more countries, “embassies of every size, resource, and geopolitical persuasion clustered as close to Embassy Row as their budgets would allow.”<sup>18</sup>

During and after the Depression from 1929 to the early 1940s many wealthy families were unable to maintain their large homes, especially along the Massachusetts Avenue corridor. The mansions became much needed building stock for embassies, and the city welcomed the careful renovations the foreign missions provided.

One notable example, the 1903 Beaux Arts style home designed for the mining millionaire Thomas Walsh by architect Henry Anderson, became the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia. The Indonesian government purchased the former mansion for \$335,000 shortly after the country gained its independence in 1949 and restored it to an original grandeur for an additional \$75,000.<sup>19</sup>



Embassy of Indonesia, 1903, repurposed 1949  
Embassy Row  
2020 Massachusetts Ave., NW  
Washington, D.C. 20036

*Wikimedia, Josh Carolina photo*

*The Kalorama Area*

Along with Dupont Circle, 16<sup>th</sup> Street, and Massachusetts Avenue, the Kalorama neighborhood eventually became much sought after property for embassies. Kalorama means “Beautiful View” in Greek, and the land once belonged to the estate of Joel Barlow (1754-1812), an eminent American diplomat who, as foreign minister to France, died in Poland attempting to meet with Napoleon.



Embassy of Malta 1903  
Kalorama Triangle  
2017 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.,  
, Washington, DC 20008

Designed by architect Waddy B. Wood, the red brick chancery exemplifies Colonial Revival architecture. The Embassy of Malta is a contributing property to the Kalorama Triangle Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1987. Wikimedia AgnosticPreachersKid photo

*Wikimedia SimonP photo*

Kalorama’s higher ground provided an especially desirable escape from Washington’s heat. (Washington, D.C. was a hardship post for foreign diplomats until residents installed air conditioning around the 1940s, although obtainable at exorbitant expense even earlier.) In the

late 1800s, land speculators built bridges and public transportation such as electric tramways to this neighborhood, designed to woo people to new homes away from the center.<sup>20</sup>

What was once Joel Barlow’s expansive estate spans two neighborhoods today – Sheridan-Kalorama and Kalorama Triangle. Wealthy socialites, former presidents, and intellectuals gravitated to Sheridan-Kalorama, while upwardly mobile middle class government workers and professionals tended to choose Kalorama Triangle. As with the other neighborhoods boasting lavish homes, a number of elegant mansions in Sheridan-Kalorama and Kalorama Triangle became embassies.<sup>21</sup>

## **PART II: THE IMPACT OF AMERICAN LAWS AND COMMISSIONS ON THE EMBASSY PRESENCE, 1962-1983**

Between World War I and World War II, only fifty-six foreign missions conducted diplomacy in the nation’s capital, a small enough cohort for the city to accommodate. By the end of World War II, however, the reconfigured geopolitical order had transformed the U.S. into a world power with concomitant diplomatic responsibilities. The global shift “set off forces that created a new landscape of embassies.” Former West Germany and Japan became staunch allies against communism, and new nations emerged as colonialism dissolved.<sup>22</sup>



This silver tray indicates how small the diplomatic cohort was at mid-century Washington, DC. Secretary of State Dean Acheson received this gift in 1953, the year he retired from the State Department. All heads of embassies in the nation’s capital signed it in his honor. A much larger piece would be required for such a gift today.

*Collection of the U.S. Diplomacy Center, Gift of David Acheson*

### *The challenge of locating chanceries in residential neighborhoods*

By the early 1960s, foreign missions were finding it increasingly difficult to secure chancery property. Residents solidly resisted a plan to expand the embassy presence into Chevy Chase, D.C. Gone were the days when an ambassador could purchase a Beaux Arts mansion on behalf of his country with cash as if this were a conventional market transaction.<sup>23</sup>

Despite complaints at home, the United States agreed to larger international obligations when it signed on to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic and Consular Relations in 1961. The Convention entered into force in 1964, under the auspices of the United Nations. Along with important agreements clarifying rights of diplomatic immunity, the Convention stipulated terms for reciprocal placement and protection of chanceries. The Convention also required that embassies of all nations be located in national capitals, stating that each country provide suitable and affordable space for foreign missions. This international agreement especially affected the State Department as the federal agency responsible meeting national diplomatic obligations. The terms of the Vienna Convention influenced the decision to set aside land for an embassy enclave in 1968 called the International Chancery Center ICC).<sup>24</sup>

If the residents of Washington, D.C. knew about the international Vienna Convention, they paid scant attention to it, understandably focusing on their own local concerns, making it clear through citizens' protests, lawsuits, and appeals to Congress that they wanted no chanceries in their neighborhoods. Residents argued that these foreign interlopers claimed premium curbside parking space and held functions that were noisy and repeatedly congested traffic. Diplomats from abroad, however, no matter local opinion, have traditionally preferred residential areas "because such sites offer more room for flag poles, caterer's tents and the sense of grandeur only satisfied by large areas of green grass."<sup>25</sup>



Royal Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1983,  
Foggy Bottom  
601 New Hampshire Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20037

The embassy received a dispensation in zoning hearings to move into the former Peoples Life Insurance Building opposite the Watergate in 1983.  
*Wikimedia SimonP photo*

#### *Attempts to Regulate Chanceries through Zoning and Planning Commissions*

In 1962 Senator J. William Fulbright, as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, heard citizens' grievances, then directed Congress to pass legislation to bar foreign governments from locating chanceries in residential areas. Congress passed the Chancery Act of 1964, which prohibited embassies from occupying residential property, and limiting placement to mixed-use or commercial neighborhoods.<sup>26</sup>

The State Department and foreign embassies worked at various times with the D.C. government, D.C. Zoning Commission, and the D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA) to secure chancery property. The Board of Zoning Adjustment was especially important as an independent, quasi-judicial body, empowered to grant relief from the strict application of Zoning Regulations. Rulings that denied foreign governments' permission to place an embassy caused difficulties abroad and affected the ability of the United States to obtain embassy property in some countries.<sup>27</sup>

Two other independent Federal agencies, currently part of the embassy location process, also weighed in on securing permissions for foreign chanceries to build or to repurpose an older building. They are the U. S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) and the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC). Congress founded the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), in 1910 to

advise the government, help guide the architectural development of the city, and foster an aesthetic awareness in urban planning.<sup>28</sup>

Today, the President appoints seven non-paid members to serve on the commission, which is authorized to comment and advise on the plans and merits of the designs that affect the appearance of the city “before final approval or action” for public buildings to be erected in the District of Columbia.<sup>29</sup>



Embassy of New Zealand, 1979, renovated in 2012  
Embassy Row  
37 Observatory Circle, NW  
Washington, DC 20008

The District Zoning Commission accepted plans for this chancery after receiving promises not to block Whitehaven Street, NW with moving or parked traffic. Sir Miles Warren created a strong, solid design to harmonize with the Georgian brick neighbors, but also incorporated a distinctive look in outstanding brick work.

*Wikimedia Roy Finneren photo*

The NCPC was founded in 1952, after Congress passed the National Capital Planning Act that same year. The NCPC serves as the planning agency for the federal government in the National Capital Region, describing itself as a 12-member Commission that adopts, approves, or provides advice on plans and projects that have an impact on the nation's capital and surrounding

areas. An important task in their portfolio is to review development projects, which includes plans for the construction or renovation of foreign missions in the city.<sup>30</sup>

In an effort to secure more property for embassies and meet the terms of the Vienna Convention, congress passed the International Center Act in 1968, which allocated a tract of low-cost federal land for a purpose-built embassy enclave called the International Chancery Center (ICC) in northwest D.C. New construction of chanceries would take place away from residential areas and “fierce neighborhood opposition to embassies.” The Act authorized the Secretary of State “to sell or lease to foreign governments and international organizations property located within the International Center along Van Ness Street in Northwest Washington, D.C.” The National Bureau of Standards once stood upon the tract, which today is dedicated to eighteen embassies in approximately one-acre parcels. “Development plans for all chanceries in the 47-acre International Center were [are still today] also subject to NCPC's approval,” but not city zoning regulations as the land is federally owned. At first embassies refused to occupy a separate, seemingly isolated enclave and it took twelve years until the State of Israel unveiled the first embassy in 1980. .<sup>31</sup>



Embassy of the State of Israel, 1980  
North Cleveland Park  
3514 International Drive, NW  
Washington, DC 20008

The first embassy of the International Center, unveiled in 1980, reflects Jerusalem’s contemporary architecture, yet blends in with other embassies and the surrounding neighborhood. Arches crown recessed windows, while the focal highlight of the interior is a multipurpose atrium conveying light into the building and evoking the Mediterranean courtyard. Architect Louis Bernardo received input from a design team including Robert Kogod of Washington, DC and Yeshayahu Mandel of Israel.

*Wikimedia Krokodyl photo*

*The 1982 Foreign Missions Act*

In 1982, Congress passed The Foreign Missions Act, which reaffirmed the jurisdiction of the Federal government over the operation of foreign missions in the United States. “Congress mandated the creation of the Office of Foreign Missions (OFM) in the Act to serve the interests of the American public, the American diplomatic community abroad, and the foreign diplomatic community residing in the United States.”<sup>32</sup>

The Act identifies a Diplomatic District that includes areas where chanceries can locate without regulatory review (Matter of Right), and areas where foreign missions may locate subject to review by the District of Columbia Foreign Missions Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA).<sup>33</sup>

Today, the Department’s Office of Foreign Missions (OFM) is the primary U.S. government entity assisting foreign missions in the United States to obtain suitable facilities. The Office of Foreign Missions protects the larger interests of the American public by ensuring that, “all diplomatic benefits, privileges, and immunities are properly exercised in accordance with federal and international laws.” The NCPC and OFM work with the District’s Bureau of Zoning Appeal. On its website, the OFM states: “Under the Foreign Mission Act of 1982, the location, expansion, or replacement of a chancery in certain mixed use areas of the city is subject to the review and possible disapproval of the BZA.”<sup>34</sup>

In the 2013 draft revisions of the NCPC’s comprehensive plan, the stated goal to accommodate the international community focuses on planning a “secure and welcoming environment” for the location of diplomatic and international activities in Washington, D.C. that respects the “status and dignity of these activities,” in a manner that is appropriate to the status and dignity of these activities, while enhancing Washington’s role as one of the world’s great capitals.”<sup>35</sup>

The Foreign Missions Act reaffirms “the Federal government’s jurisdiction over the operation of foreign missions and international organizations in the United States.

. . . the Foreign Mission Act establishes procedures and criteria governing the location, replacement, or expansion of chanceries in the District of Columbia.  
[and] establishes procedures and criteria governing the location, replacement, or expansion of chanceries

Additionally, “under the Foreign Missions Act, OFM’s Property Program manages all acquisitions and sales of real property by foreign missions to assure that it is consistent with

national security interests, reciprocity, and applicable local and international law.” The Property Section provides general guidance to “foreign missions, local governments, attorneys, and real estate brokers regarding property taxation, zoning, and other related matters.”<sup>36</sup>

### **PART III: AN OVERVIEW OF CHANCERY ARCHITECTURE FROM 1960 TO TODAY**

#### *Overview of embassy architecture*

Today embassies present a wide variety of structural forms. Despite the design of innovative embassies, approximately seventy-five percent of the one hundred and seventy foreign missions in Washington, D.C. inhabit late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century mansions or structures. A visual array of these repurposed edifices can be found in the chart at:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_diplomatic\\_missions\\_in\\_Washington,\\_D.C.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_diplomatic_missions_in_Washington,_D.C.)

#### *Overview of embassy architecture in Washington, D.C.*

Embassies present a variety of forms in the contemporary city, including townhouse-type, attached structures, mid-rise or high-rise buildings adjacent to other edifices, and detached, stand-alone buildings.

Architecturally, embassies exemplify three broad types:<sup>37</sup>

- Mansions in the Beaux Arts style of the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by architects such as Jules Henri de Sibour, George Oakley Totten, Henry Anderson, and Nathan Wyeth. Other large homes such as the Forrest-Margay home in Georgetown, which the Embassy of Ukraine occupies, date from an earlier period (in this case, the 18<sup>th</sup> century). These are primarily located in the neighborhoods of Dupont Circle, the Massachusetts Avenue “Embassy Row” corridor, 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, Kalorama, and Georgetown.
- Modern office-type buildings developed from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards as nations sought to create a physical identity that embodied national values and elevated their prestige in a nation they perceived as the most powerful in the world. Additionally, over time, the scope and complexity of modern diplomacy meant that missions outgrew repurposed mansions. Within the past twenty years, especially, the need for more office space, advanced technology, parking, and assembly rooms have led countries to build embassies designed by architects with international reputations. These creative designers

include Egon Eiermann (Germany), Arthur Erickson (Canada), Mikko Heikknen and Markku Komonen (Finland), Vilhelm Lauritzen (Denmark), William Lescaze (Switzerland), I.M. Pei (China), Piero Sartogo (Italy), André Remondet (France), and Gert Wingarth and Tomas Hansen (Sweden). Photos of these embassies appear in the following pages.

- Buildings reflecting the cultural or ethnic character of the nation inhabiting it (encouraged by the NCPC and frequently designed by U.S. architects) such as Ghana, Malaysia, and the United Arab Emirates. These primarily appear in the newest city enclave, the International Chancery Center.

The remaining twenty-five percent of chanceries embody varied and modern 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century styles, although several purpose-built embassies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as those of Great Britain and Japan, have a more traditional than modernist appearance. One important factor affecting the architectural form of embassies in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, is the NCPC's encouraging nations to accept designs that reflect—but not imitate—national identity. The 2004 Comprehensive Plan on the urban design of chancery siting states, “Construct buildings and landscapes that demonstrate an appreciation of the architectural style and landscape of the surrounding environs while representing the finest architectural thought of the corresponding nation.”<sup>38</sup>

Some architectural commentators have written reviews criticizing the resulting appearance of some of these idiomatic buildings both as individual structures and within a distinctive grouping in the International Chancery Center. Architectural critic Benjamin Forgey ends a *Washington Post* article on the International compound saying: “The center is strange, and is likely to remain strange.”<sup>39</sup>

### *Some reasons for embassies to remain in repurposed buildings*

Before looking at a selection of the more individualistic contemporary architectural designs, this essay offers some reasons why embassies may decide to remain in re-purposed older structures while others are motivated to create distinctive new quarters.

It appears that chanceries remaining in an older building reflect diplomatic satisfaction with the size of the building in relationship to the size (and relative importance) of the diplomatic

mission Some embassies express pride in the architecture, historic preservation and historic presence in Washington, D.C. as revealed, for example, by the web sites of India, Indonesia, Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine. A good location within the city is also highly desirable for chanceries, even if situated in older buildings. When positioned close to neighbors of allied nations, the State Department, White House, and international organizations, there would be less incentive to relocate, especially to identify a piece of property then face the daunting and frustrating zoning process.<sup>40</sup>

Creating a new chancery is both time consuming and expensive. Some nations own their embassy buildings or lease them for reasonable sums and can keep the property up without a financial struggle. Their national governments prioritize funds for other needs rather than a new building in a foreign country.

*Some reasons for nations to create modern new embassies*

Praise for modern embassies often includes the idea that the new building generates a strong national identity and symbolizes a country's core values—in the capital of the most powerful nation in the world. Countries may rely on the impact of a new, impressive chancery to influence the United States and other allies to increase trade relations and cultural exchanges; offer grants and aid (if relevant), expand tourism, and promote other favorable diplomatic outcomes. Unlike older embassies, the users of new buildings seek the most modern office technology and audio visual systems for negotiations as part of forward looking image, official visits, and public programs. The modern electronic systems contribute to developing robust public diplomacy programs for new assembly spaces, especially those that gather large audiences or celebratory groups for reaching out and building good will.<sup>41</sup>

Some new embassies lease land on favorable terms from the U.S. government, which makes a new embassy site a good economic choice. This property often enables an embassy to improve security, transportation, parking (many new embassies have underground garages for hundreds of vehicles), and other similar practical needs in a favorable new location.

Finally, several new embassies, including that of Denmark and Israel, became the vision of a head of state or ambassador. Through this individual's determination and will, the embassy was completed and today embodies the national pride of the building's champion.<sup>42</sup>

*The arrival of modernist embassies in Washington, D.C.*

Before modernist embassies drew the attention of architectural critics in Washington, D.C. there was a 40-year gap between the creation of modernist architecture in Europe and its arrival in the capital of the United States. Architectural historian Jane Loeffler writes that in the 1950s, the State Department saw the value in building modernist embassies and “commissioned some of America’s best known modernists to design new embassies overseas. These embassies, whose glass façades were a metaphor for American freedom and openness, scored a Cold War public-relations win over the drab embassies of the Soviets.” During the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the architectural climate of Washington, D.C. favored traditional design. In 1960, Denmark opened one of the first modernist foreign missions in the United States presenting a building that held the combined Danish chancery and residence. After the embassy of the Kingdom of Denmark was opened, other nations followed the trend toward modernism. <sup>43</sup>



Embassy of the Kingdom of Denmark, 1960  
Embassy Row  
3200 Whitehaven Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20008

The first modern foreign mission in Washington, DC, opened in 1960. Danish Ambassador Henrik Kaufmann wanted the embassy to reflect Danish modesty and democratic principles, as reflected in this accessible and transparent entrance. The marble-clad white walls and large windows made “the Embassy appear light, open, and welcoming.” Architect Vilhelm Lauritzen,

*Embassy of the Kingdom of Denmark photo*

*Purpose-built embassies in Washington, D.C. neighborhoods (other than the International Center) constructed between 1964-2006*



Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany  
1964  
Colony Hill  
(photo prior to 2014 renovation)  
4645 Reservoir Road, NW  
Washington, DC 20008

Highly praised for its “precise, efficient functionalism,” critics acclaimed its symbolizing the “spirit of a new democracy.” Egon Eiermann designed it to fit into a complex piece of land in a sedate residential neighborhood.

*Wikipedia Josh Carolina photo*



Embassy of Finland, 1994  
Embassy Row  
3301 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20008

Showing a strong affinity for nature, this chancery, clad in glass and copper, exemplifies how much the Finish value modernity. Architects Mikko Heikknen and Markku Komonen designed a light-filled building; the first with LEED certification in the United States.

*Wikimedia Slowking4 photo*



Embassy of Switzerland, 1959  
Woodley Park  
2900 Cathedral Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC

Made of warm blond brick, the chancery fits ingeniously into its landscape. Architect William Lescaze created a modern classic with a clean-lined airy effect. A steel-canopied entrance leads into a glass-walled lobby.

*Wikimedia Aaron Siirila photo*



Embassy of France, 1984  
Georgetown neighborhood  
4101 Reservoir Road, NW  
Washington, DC 20007

Architect André Remondet designed a layered building in the modern style, set against the trees. The edifice comprises four interlinking sections to accommodate embassy duties.

*Wikimedia SimonP photo*



Embassy of Italy, 2000  
Embassy Row  
3000 Whitehaven Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20008

Although contemporary in appearance, architect Piero Sartogo's exterior evokes both a Tuscan villa and an Italian Renaissance palace. The central atrium showcases Italian design.

*Wikimedia SimonP photo*



Embassy of the Kingdom of Sweden, 2006  
Georgetown  
2900 K St., NW  
Washington, DC 20007

The only embassy built on the Potomac River appears like a glowing translucent glass box at night. Architects Gert Wingarth and Tomas Hansen designed a cultural reference to their forested country with the wooden balcony cladding.

*Wikimedia Elvert Barnes photo*



Embassy of the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire  
Embassy Row  
2424 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20008

Designed by architect Anchul Lee to blend two separate buildings (left and right in photo) into a modern and visually striking whole.

*Wikimedia AgnosticPreachersKid photo*



Embassy of Canada, 1989  
Penn Quarter  
501 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20001

The large entrance courtyard features a rotunda supported by twelve pillars, one for each of the country's provinces. Architect Arthur Erikson designed the columns to acknowledge the style of the Federal Trade Commission building next door and the courtyard's sharp angle to echo I.M. Pei's East Wing of the National Gallery of Art across the street. The embassy is the closest of all foreign missions to the Capitol.

*Wikimedia Brunswyk photo*



Embassy of the Republic of Turkey, 1999  
Sheridan-Kalorama neighborhood  
2525 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20008

Designed by Shalom Baranes Associates, the chancery reflects aspects of Turkish vernacular architecture while harmonizing with the styles of the Sheridan-Kalorama neighborhood.

*Wikimedia SimonP photo*

### *Embassies in the International Circle from 1980 to the Present*

Chancery construction did not immediately follow the new the Embassy of Israel, but by 2014, seventeen embassies had leased all the parcels of land from the U.S. government at subsidized rates, with one more to come, the Embassy of Morocco.<sup>44</sup>

Countries that relocated their embassies to the International Chancery Center, NW, include: Austria, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Republic of Cameroon, People's Republic of China, Arab Republic of Egypt, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ghana, Israel, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Malaysia, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Pakistan, the Republic of Singapore, the Slovak Republic, and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>45</sup>

*Washington Post* critic Roger Lewis has stated there are two design principles have stood out in the International Center architecture. One is to “draw from the country’s vernacular architecture” and “make an architectural statement about the nation represented Others [architects] have followed the design aesthetic and technology of the moment.” The State Department and NCPC have particularly encouraged creating buildings with a national flavor.<sup>46</sup>

The variety in chanceries includes an array of architectural parts and a wide range of materials. Observers have catalogued the “array” as —“sloping and flat roofs, domes and vaults, rectangular and arched openings, free-standing columns, latticework and trellises, sunscreens, glazed curtain walls, projecting bay windows and cantilevered brackets.” The variety of materials includes—“steel and aluminum, chrome, glass, precast concrete panels, dimensioned stone, brick, stucco, tile, and wood.” The result of this mixture of styles, as stated earlier, is that the enclave as a whole has caused some to applaud and others to disparage it.<sup>47</sup>

Despite some buildings looking out of place to critical observers, the variety takes the viewer around the world, and that is something to expect—and appreciate—in Washington, D.C.<sup>48</sup>

Those with a critical opinion of International Circle have remarked that they view the enclave as “Disneyland for contemporary architecture buffs” or “an array of exotic and even cartoonish-looking structures.” In the end, however, “in order to avoid international displeasure” D.C. planners and commissioners may have accepted some embassy designs they might have more insistently tried to change.<sup>49</sup>



Embassy of the Republic of Singapore, 1991  
North Cleveland Park  
3501 International Place, NW  
Washington, DC 20008

Architect D. Rodman Henderer of RTKL Associates integrated regional details into a crisp modernist design.

*Wikimedia Gyrofrog photo*



The Embassy of the People's Republic of China, 2008  
North Cleveland Park  
3505 International Place, NW  
Washington, DC 20008

Designed by Pei Partnership Architects, the embassy reflects China's position in the world as an emerging power. The architects used ornamental gardens and distinctive geometrical forms that "suggest a Chinese aura without copying a pagoda."

*Wikimedia Krokodyl photo*



The Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia  
North Cleveland Park  
3506 International Drive, NW  
Washington, DC 20008

This RTKL Associates' contemporary design loosely bases its appearance on remarkable medieval churches hewn from stone in Ethiopia's remote highlands.

*Wikimedia Gyrofrog photo*



Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, 2002  
North Cleveland Park  
3522 International Ct., NW  
Washington, DC 20008

Architect Angelos Demetriou of Angelos Demetriou & Associates designed this chancery to balance both classical Islamic architecture and modern sensibility. The architect sought to recall, but not replicate, Islamic architecture, which to Demetriou, is one of the most historical and important styles in the world.

*Wikimedia Gyrofrog photo*



Embassy of Ghana, 1989  
North Cleveland Park  
3512 International Drive, NW  
Washington, DC 20008

Adinkra Symbols, important conveyers of cultural messages on the chancery's outer wall, appear in the textiles, visual arts, and architecture of Ghana. The square with looped corners set in the middle of the longer wall, "ties the knot," representing peacemaking and reconciliation." The firm Brown and Wright designed the chancery.

*Wikimedia Gyrofrog photo.*



Embassy of Malaysia, 2002  
North Cleveland Park  
3516 International Court, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20008

The chancery is reminiscent of early 20th century Malaysian buildings, juxtaposing vernacular Malay architecture and imported western, mainly British, architectural elements, also known as the 'Anglo-Straits' architectural style. Visitors enter the main reception area via an 'anjung', a greeting point in traditional Malay houses, with a traditional roof structure called the 'bumbung limas'. Architects conceived a replica to the palace of the Malay Sultanate with its ornately carved walls and pillars in the hall.

*Gyrofrog Wikimedia Photo*



The Embassy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 2002      North  
Cleveland Park  
3519 International Court, NW  
Washington, DC, 20008.

Robert Sponseller, a principal of the architecture firm Shalom Baranes, at the request of the Nigerian government, designed a contemporary building that evoked West African architecture, but mainly captured sleek forward-looking lines.

*Wikimedia Gyrofrog photo*

## **PART IV: THE FUTURE OF EMBASSIES IN WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Washington, D.C. is one of the smallest capitals in the world yet is home to the physical presence of some 188 countries. When embassies focused less on public diplomacy, buildings did not need large assembly spaces. The new emphasis on public events has, ultimately, caused a shift in the size and configurations of contemporary embassies, “with buildings increasingly used to signify the importance the country places in its relations with its host and to project a positive image.”<sup>50</sup>

### *Embassy real estate*

The availability of adequate space for the construction and operation of chanceries by foreign missions has been a long-standing challenge in Washington, D.C., as seen in Part II of this essay. “The availability of sites that meet the needs of foreign missions within the traditional diplomatic areas is increasingly limited.”<sup>51</sup>

### *The profile of a modern embassy’s needs*

Foreign missions needs include chanceries, embassies, residences for their ambassadors and their families, as well as consulates, cultural centers, office annexes, and other buildings, such as garages or grounds-keeping sheds. This essay focuses on chanceries as the “heart” of an embassy, but acknowledges that the more informal diplomacy occurring at dinner parties, concerts, receptions, and other events in diplomatic residences also holds significant weight.



European Union (EU) poster advertising the May 2014 embassy open house. Over 10,000 people visited twenty-four EU open house embassies in May 2013. European Union photo

The economic resources of a country do not immediately appear to affect its location. Embassies from developing countries such as Cote d'Ivoire, the Marshall Islands, or Bolivia are located within the prestigious Massachusetts Avenue-Dupont Circle neighborhood. Along the 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW corridor, stand the Embassies of Uganda, the Republic of the Congo, Liberia, and Latvia. Wealthy nations can afford, in general, embassies with more substance or impactful architecture, but as the International Center reveals, many less economically advanced countries now direct foreign affairs from modern buildings with impressive and/or idiosyncratic designs. When countries fall into dire straits such as wars, civil unrest, severe climate conditions, or natural disasters, they may have to delay repairs or cease property upkeep, eventually closing their embassy until they can resume living there and make repairs.

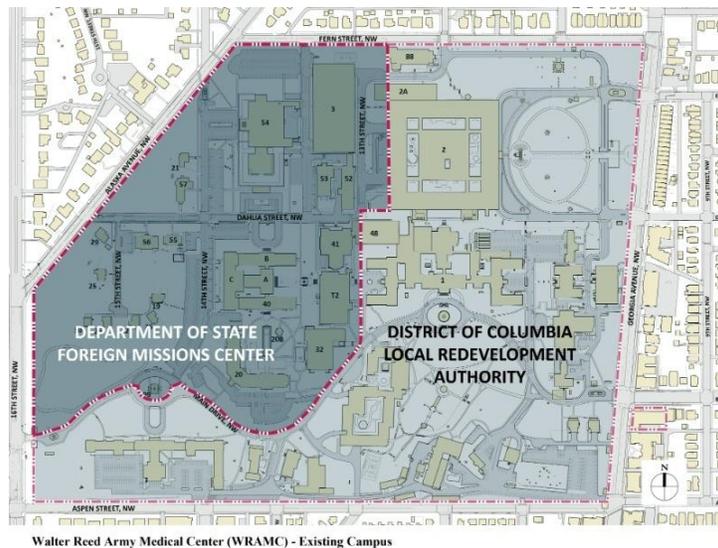
*Availability of land for future embassies—the Foreign Mission Center*

With the International Chancery Center fully occupied, Washington will have to look for other sites in the city for new embassies. The need for new sites will most likely arise from foreign missions expanding their presence and, thus, their need for services such as more office space, parking, public diplomacy space, or access to communications. Other requests will likely come from countries establishing new or renewed diplomatic relations with the U.S. or those whose representative is accredited to the United Nations and the United States of America moving offices from New York to Washington, D.C. The 2004 Comprehensive Plan National Capital Planning Commission report predicted that following the current trends, embassies may need to find as many as one hundred new or relocated spaces by 2030. This fact is based on the following growth pattern: In 1983, one hundred thirty-three foreign missions were counted in Washington, D.C.; whereas a generation later, in 2003, the number increased to one hundred sixty-nine—adding almost two new missions a year.<sup>52</sup>

One locale currently under review for future chanceries is a 43.5-acre embassy campus on the site of the former Walter Reed Army Medical Center on 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW. As of 2013, the State Department Office of Foreign Missions has begun a Master Plan for the development of some ten to fifteen chanceries on the Walter Reed site following the successful model of the International Chancery Center. The development of the Foreign Mission Center will adhere to NCPC guidelines of the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*.

The Master Plan entails completing an environmental impact statement to provide the Department, other agencies, and the public “with a full accounting of the potential environmental impacts prior to decision-making.” The State Department signed off on a Draft Environmental Impact Statement in January, 2014, which examined the impact of the proposed development of this site on the natural, social, and cultural environment, paying attention to the resources of “land, water, air, structures, living organisms, environmental values at the site, and social, cultural, and economic factors, including transportation, traffic, and parking.”<sup>53</sup>

The Walter Reed Army Medical Center Historic District is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places due to the significance in military field medicine and architectural design. Proposed plans exist to repurpose some of the historic buildings for embassy use, while dictating the removal of others.<sup>54</sup>



The allocation of 43.5 acres at the northwest portion of the site for the Foreign Mission Center, where the U.S. government will grant subsidized long-term leases for nations to build chanceries.

### *Embassy Presence and a Contribution to Preserving American History*

A different example of embassy presence in Washington, D.C., the Embassy of Ukraine in Georgetown, incorporates more than the architecture of the bricks and mortar of a physical structure. Indeed, the NCPC, in guidelines for siting embassies states, “Preserve and maintain the features and character of historic properties.” The embassy presence in this case enriches diplomatic relations by conserving the memory of a significant event in the history of the host

country—an event that made it possible for there to be an embassy presence in Washington, D.C. at all. The threads of history in this story weave a bond between the beginning and the future of the embassy presence in Washington, D.C. that is both unique and significant.<sup>55</sup>

In 1992, the Ukrainian government purchased the renovated Forrest-Marbury Mansion in Georgetown where, in 1997, they inaugurated the George Washington Memorial Room. Here, during a dinner on March 29, 1791, the owner, Uriah Forrest, hosted President Washington and other military officers. Over dinner the group agreed to secure the property that would become the capital of the United States. “Thus, the Forrest - Marbury House is the site of one of the United States' most significant historical events, the establishment of the federal city of Washington, D.C.” The presence of this embassy circles back to the very foundation of the capital. Had this dinner not taken place, or had they not earmarked this land, who knows where in the U.S. embassies would be functioning today?<sup>56</sup>



Embassy of Ukraine, built c.1788-90 Ukrainian Embassy, 1992,  
Georgetown  
3350 M St., NW  
Washington, DC 20007

Former Forrest-Marbury Mansion  
*Wikimedia Kobac photo*

### *Why Do Foreign Missions in the U.S. Matter?*

How the U.S. government deals with foreign missions here at home can have an impact on U.S. diplomacy around the world. In conducting government-to-government diplomacy, embassies can provide the location where government officials and ambassadors discuss international affairs that affect U.S. national security, advance prosperity, shore-up peacekeeping goals, and conduct other matters of international concern. A safe, environmentally sound, and comfortable setting helps ensure that these negotiations lead to diplomatically successful results.

Interest in foreign missions in Washington, D.C. may seem removed from everyday life, but in fact, their presence affects every U.S. citizen, either directly or indirectly, as the nation's capital belongs to everyone. Embassies and other diplomatic missions matter to Washington, D.C. and the U.S. because they encourage:

1. Close cooperation with international missions. This can help coordinate relief initiatives in times of natural disaster or civic unrest in foreign countries.
2. Attracting money into the District and U.S. As part of the international business industry in the early 2000s, foreign missions helped generate \$10.4 billion in direct spending in the District alone.
3. Promoting trade, commerce, and investment, which in turn benefits U.S. business interests and helps generate jobs.
4. U.S. travelers to obtain visas and other documents for international journeys.
5. Preservation of historic buildings and/or starting architectural trends that have an impact on the city's presence, appearance, and status as a major world capital.
6. Salaries for nearly 10,000 District workers with a \$300 million payroll. Strong employment keeps the District financially solvent.
7. Foreign diplomats spend over \$32 million annually in the United States.
8. Visitors who spend over \$183 million a year on food, lodging, and shopping.
9. Tax revenue of almost \$24 million annually from property foreign missions lease from the city.<sup>57</sup>

The list above indicates the tangible importance of embassies and other diplomatic missions, but, in fact, they are more than a collection of buildings. Embassies symbolize the diplomatic bond that nations develop that preserve their security and promote their prosperity.

Embassies represent the best of international cooperation—people gathering to use words, not arms—to resolve differences and cement friendships.

The history of the embassy presence in the nation's capital has developed from the dreams of Pierre L'Enfant and his diplomatic missions on the Mall to the internationally acclaimed architecture of modern chanceries. Whatever future trends emerge in Washington's development, the embassy presence will fill a significant role.



An image of individual D.C. embassies appears on the following web site:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_diplomatic\\_missions\\_in\\_Washington,\\_D.C](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_diplomatic_missions_in_Washington,_D.C)

NOTE: References related to individual embassies in photos are located in a section that follows the endnotes. These embassy references are listed in alphabetical order by country name.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of State Office of Protocol, U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/> (accessed April 22, 2014)
- <sup>4</sup> Conroy, Sarah Booth, "The Era of Elegant Embassies," *The Washington Post*, January 25, 1976
- <sup>5</sup> Highsmith, Carol M. and Ted Lamphair, *Embassies of Washington*, Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1992, 13-14
- <sup>6</sup> The David M. Rubenstein National Center for White House History, White House Historical Association, "Decatur House on Lafayette Square" <http://www.whitehousehistory.org/decatur-house/decatur-house-history/> (accessed April 24, 2014); National Capital Planning Commission, Foreign Missions and International Organizations, 2004, 63
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