

**CITY OF ROCKVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT**

**December 16, 2010
MEETING NO. 15-10**

APPLICATION: HDC2011-00520
ADDRESS: 540 Beall Avenue
ACCEPTED: 10/19/10
OWNER: Mark and Doniphan
Howland
REQUEST: Evaluation of Significance
STAFF: Robin D. Ziek



PROJECT SUMMARY:

Mr. and Mrs. Howland are nominating their own property at 540 Beall Avenue for local historic designation. They request an HDC Evaluation of Significance to start the process.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the HDC support this nomination on the basis that the property has historic significance under Criteria I-C, as representative of the late 19th century development of West End Park by Henry Copp; and under II-A, as a good representative of a Front Gable house at the turn of the century.

[DRAFT MOTION OF APPROVAL:]

Finding HDC2011-00520, for Evaluation of Significance for historic designation for 540 Beall Avenue, to meet the City's criteria I-C and II-A for historic significance, I recommend that the Mayor and Council proceed with historic district re-zoning of this property.

BACKGROUND:

Mark and Doniphan Howland purchased the property in 1985, and are the current owners. They submitted this nomination on October 19, 2010, requesting historic designation through historic district re-zoning for this property (see circle 1, 2). The Mayor and Council will review a proposal for re-zoning if the Historic District Commission supports a positive recommendation based on their Evaluation of Historic Significance.

The property faces north and is located close to the intersection of Beall Avenue and Manakee Street. The large traffic circle at this intersection was platted with the West End Park subdivision and was also the site of a community well. Directly across the street sits the house that Henry N. Copp

built for himself, at 541 Beall Avenue (see page 4). This large Victorian house, known as the Allnutt House, is both a locally designated historic resource, and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. There are numerous new homes of varying sizes and styles in the immediate neighborhood, as old homes have been purchased, demolished, and replaced (see below, page 2, and page 4).

The neighborhood is characterized by a continuous rhythm of homes along the narrow street. Front porches are common on the older homes, and the properties have deep back yards. The south side of Beall Avenue at this location is topographically higher than the north side, and 540 Beall Avenue has a retaining wall along the sidewalk for the front yard. The driveway on the east side of the house extends into the backyard, to the site of an early garage that has been torn down. The back yard is enclosed with a privacy fence, and the grounds are thoughtfully landscaped and well maintained.

Property Description:

The property is described in detail in the MHT form prepared by David Wilder for Peerless Rockville in 1993 (see circle 5 - 9). This is a two-story frame house, built ca. 1909, with a square central block with a pyramidal roof; and two-story front gable sections on the front and rear. The roofline ends with a shallow kick to provide wide eaves, and both gable ends have strong cornice returns. There is a fullwidth front porch, with turned columns and decorative porch brackets. The narrowly proportioned 1/1 double-hung windows are framed with wall-mounted shutters. The large square window in the front gable, providing light to the attic area, has a common Victorian border pattern. The front door is a single-width with a transom above. The siding is a moderately wide clapboard, with simple wood trim around the windows.



North (front) elevation, looking SW to adjacent new construction



South (rear) elevation

The rear elevation has an enclosed rear porch, with shed roof, in the angle formed with the rear addition. There is a low deck at the back of the house, leading to a flagstone patio. The 1993 MHT form details changes that were made to the property over time (see circle 8).

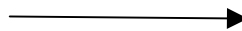


Interior details:

1st floor newel post



2nd floor newel post





541 Beall Ave. [Confronting Properties] 539 Beall Ave.

Liber/Folio	Date	Grantor	Grantee
J.A. 21/322	10/10/1890 [\$50,000 for 247 acres]	John Vinson	Henry N. Copp
J.A.60/71	9/27/1897 * [\$1,200 for lots 48, 49, 50]	Henry N. Copp	Mary E. Rowe [of Indianapolis]
J.L.B. 198/189	4/20/1908 [Lots 48, 49, 50]	Mary E. Rowe [of Missouri]	Robert A. Coe
JLB 202/230	1/21/1909 [Lots 22, 23, 48, 49, 50]	Robert A. Coe	Martin F. Heim
JLB 202/492	3/31/1909 [Lots 22, 23, 48, 49, 50]	Martin F. Heim	John F. Fisher
208/351	9/16/1909 [Lot 50]	John F. Fisher	Mariel G. Mills & John H. Mills
292/88	3/30/1920	Mariel G. Mills & John H. Mills	Mary A. Thrift
518/435	3/24/1931	Mary A. Thrift	Mary E Thrift & Agnes E. Fisher
534/79	2/27/1932 10:32 am [Lot 50, 51]	Mary E. Thrift & Agnes E. Fisher	John Vinson Peter
534/81	2/27/1932 10:34 a.m. [Lot 50, 51]	John Vinson Peter	Mary E. Thrift, Agnes E. Fisher, Lucile Bailey

* Research prepared by David Wilder for Peerless Rockville in 1993 indicates that the property was sold at an earlier date (1892) but recorded five years later. The high price paid for the property would support this assertion, given the nationwide real estate depression in 1893; see MHT form M: 26/7/8 (see circle 7).

2796/344	11/7/1960 [Lot 50, 51]	Thomas E. Bailey	Ashely C. Pearson
3130/148	8/2/1963 [Lot 51]	Ashely C. Pearson	Rogers Construction
3130/176	8/2/1963 [Lot 50]	Ashely C. Pearson	Glenn J. Baldwin
3368/102	6/16/1965 [Lot 50]	Glenn J. Baldwin	Lee C. Price
4317/237	12/15/1972	Lee C. Price	Kirk A. Hornbeck
4756/735	3/5/1976 [\$45,400]	Kirk A. Hornbeck	Douglas Sporn
5525/638	5/29/1980	Douglas Sporn	Robert I. Parker
6096/644	6/10/1983 [\$94,000]	Robert I. Parker	Ronald G. Washburn
6935/318	11/22/1985 [\$120,000]	Ronald G. Washburn	Mark & Doniphan Howland

Historic Significance:

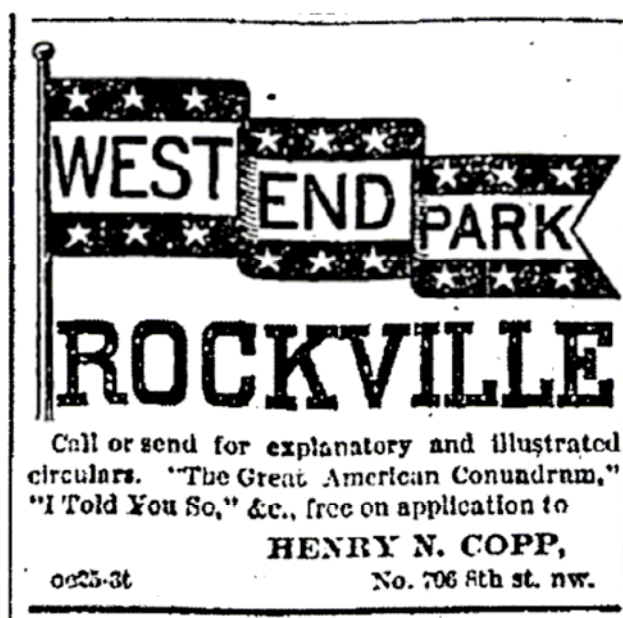
The HDC must use its adopted criteria to evaluate the historic significance of a property. The criteria are based on those used for listing properties in the National Register of Historic Places, but most properties evaluated by the HDC will have local significance. Factors for consideration are the architecture, the history of the property, and how these inform the history of Rockville. Finally, an assessment of integrity will reflect the ability of the property to tell its story.

Architecture: 540 Beall Avenue is a transitional vernacular Front Gable two-story frame house, built circa 1909. With Victorian features, such as the vertical scale, patterned window in the front gable, and the [restored] front porch decorative elements, the house reflects late 19th century design. Early 20th century ideas that reflect the Prairie style and its relative, the American Foursquare, can be seen in the pyramidal roof and general massing. Finally, there are Colonial Revival details as well, such as the broken pediment in the front gable. Such eclectic design was not a-typical in this time period. Technological changes meant that construction and design elements were manufactured rather than hand-crafted and separate elements, or entire houses, could be delivered inexpensively by rail. Product advertising with pattern books, magazines, and newspapers also encouraged and supported eclectic design by providing a menu of choices for the market, or “the homeseekers.”

The foursquare plan involves a side entry hall leading to the kitchen at the rear, with the living and dining rooms to one side to fill out the square. It’s an efficient house to build. This house reflects this general plan, but with modifications with the front gable addition and rear gable ell. The modest size of the house, which is seen elsewhere in the city at this time period, reflects the new ability of middle class families to buy their own homes. The house has relatively simple detailing, with a few special elements such as the decorative newel post on the first floor and the attic window on the facade.

History: The property illustrates the development of West End Park by Henry N. Copp.¹ The subject property was part of the land sold by John Vinson to Henry Copp in 1890, who envisioned a large subdivision named West End Park. Copp's 1890 publication, entitled: *How to Get Health, Wealth, Comfort. Peerless Rockville. What it offers to Homeseekers and Investors*, provides a glowing view of life in the Town of Rockville in the late 19th century.

The Washington Post Oct 26, 1890 Page 11



The early history of the subject property, however, is one of land speculation. The property was purchased by Mary E. Rowe, a woman living in Indianapolis, who paid a substantial price. [J.A. 60/71]. She held the lots for sixteen years, by which time she had moved to Missouri. She sold the property at a substantial loss, but it did free up the property for development. After another flurry of speculation by local residents,² the property was purchased by Marial and John H. Mills, and it is likely that they built the house on Lot 50 and used Lot 51 as a sideyard until its sale in 1963 for a separate house.³

¹ Henry N. Copp was an Attorney in Washington, with experience in land use (see circle 11-13).

² Martin Heim lived in East Rockville on Baltimore Road, and is well known for his real estate transactions.

³ While more research is needed, the next generation of this family, with John and Sylvia Mills, were responsible for the construction of many homes in East Rockville, especially in Croydon Park.

While the house that was built at 540 Beall Avenue may not have been the house envisioned by Henry Copp, it serves to illustrate the effects of the late 19th century speculative real estate market on the development of this neighborhood in Rockville.

Location: The proposed designation of 540 Beall Avenue complements the designated property across the street at 541 Beall Avenue and, together, they provide a more complete view of the West End Park development. The two homes, constructed almost 20 years apart, illustrate the Victorian phase of this subdivision. The larger home at 541 Beall Avenue reflects the early vision of Henry Copp, a figure of national standing, reaching out nationwide with hopes of building a great neighborhood within walking distance (along brick sidewalks) of the Metropolitan Branch of the B&O Railroad. Twenty years later, local Rockville residents continue to embrace the vision, but with some modifications in terms of size, scale and design.

Historic District Criteria:

Staff recommends that the property at 540 Beall Avenue has historic significance under the following HDC criteria:

I-C Pattern of Events: Exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, political or historic heritage of the County and its communities.

The property at 540 Beall Avenue exemplifies the development of West End Park, one of the important late 19th century subdivisions in Rockville. This subdivision was based on a national suburban model made possible by the extension of the Metropolitan Branch of the B&O Railroad from Washington DC into Rockville. The specific history of the property illustrates the economic hazards of the rampant land speculation in the late 19th century, and illustrates the city's slow recovery at the turn of the 20th century.

II-A Architecture: Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction.

The property at 540 Beall Avenue is a good example of the smaller scale late Victorian homes being built in Rockville at the turn of the century. It is a good example of the eclectic use of design components from various architectural styles in a home of modest size.

Integrity: While there have been many alterations at the property, most of the exterior alterations are minor and/or at the rear. All of the windows are original 1/1 wood double-hung sash, with original wood trim. Evidence in the window trim on first floor windows on all elevations indicates that there were originally shutters on all of the windows. The existing shutters are, therefore, replacement shutters that are installed without moveable hinges. There are remnants of storm sash hinges on a side window, indicating that the house also originally had wooden storm windows. Today, it has metal triple-track storm windows. The roof is covered with replacement asphalt shingles. The house is currently clad with wide aluminum siding that covers the original siding. The new siding, shutters, and storm windows are all reversible alterations. The property is easily recognized as "of its day" and it conveys its historic significance, as reflected in the HDC criteria identified above.