

Carter G. Woodson House
1538 9th Street, NW
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-369

HABS
DC,
WASH.
545-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS
DC,
WASH,
545-

ARCHITECTURAL DATA FORM

STATE District of Columbia	COUNTY	TOWN OR VICINITY Washington
HISTORIC NAME OF STRUCTURE (INCLUDE SOURCE FOR NAME) Carter G. Woodson House		HABS NO. DC-369
SECONDARY OR COMMON NAMES OF STRUCTURE		
COMPLETE ADDRESS (DESCRIBE LOCATION FOR RURAL SITES) 1538 9th Street, NW		
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE SOURCE) ca. 1890	ARCHITECT(S) (INCLUDE SOURCE)	
SIGNIFICANCE (ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL, INCLUDE ORIGINAL USE OF STRUCTURE) Home of Cater G. Woodson (1875-1950), noted black educator, ahistorian, and writer. Instru- mental in the early promotion of black historical studies, Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, the association being based in this house.		
STYLE (IF APPROPRIATE)		
MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS) Brick; marble trim		
SHAPE AND DIMENSIONS OF STRUCTURE (SKETCHED FLOOR PLANS ON SEPARATE PAGES ARE ACCEPTABLE) 3-story rowhouse; 3-bay front		
EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE Bracketed cornice; bracketed cornice above door; marble lintels, sills and water table;		
INTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (DESCRIBE FLOOR PLANS, IF NOT SKETCHED)		
MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS WITH DATES		
PRESENT CONDITION AND USE Condition in 1979 appeared poor.		
OTHER INFORMATION AS APPROPRIATE		
SOURCES OF INFORMATION (INCLUDING LISTING ON NATIONAL REGISTER, STATE REGISTERS, ETC.) Listed on National Register of Historic Places (Information above taken from nomination form)		
COMPILER, AFFILIATION Druscilla J. Null; HABS	DATE 7/13/83	

ADDENDUM TO:
CARTER G. WOODSON HOUSE
Carter G. Woodson National Historic Site
1538 Ninth Street Northwest
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS DC-369
HABS DC, WASH, 545-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Addendum to

CARTER G. WOODSON HOUSE (The Carter G. Woodson Home National Historic Site)

HABS No. DC-369

NOTE: Existing Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation of the Carter G. Woodson House includes three photographs and associated captions from 1979 and an architectural data form from 1983.

Location: 1538 Ninth Street NW, Washington, District of Columbia

The Carter G. Woodson House is located at latitude 38.910797, and longitude -77.024271. The coordinate represents the point of intersection of the west wall of the house's main block and the south wall of its rear ell. This coordinate was obtained using Google Earth imagery dated October 12, 2012, and its datum is World Geodetic System of 1984 (WGS-84). The Carter G. Woodson House location has no restriction on its release to the public.

Significance: The house at No. 1538 Ninth Street NW was the home, office, and workplace of Carter Godwin Woodson (1875-1950)—the “Father of Black History”—for nearly three decades during the most significant years of his life as a pioneering historian of African-American social and cultural history. He not only researched and wrote numerous books while resident in the house, but also used it as the headquarters of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (now the Association for the Study of African American Life and History) and the organization's related journals, the *Journal of Negro History* (now the *Journal of African American History*) and the *Negro History Bulletin* (now the *Black History Bulletin*). Dr. Woodson also operated Associated Publishers, Inc., out of the house, an independent commercial publishing house for books on African-American topics. The contributions that Dr. Woodson made in raising the profile of African-American history in the United States were unprecedented for their qualitative and quantitative breadth. In addition to situating African-American history as an integral part of American history and life, he was an early adopter of a multidisciplinary outlook in historical research and writing that foreshadowed significant changes to the field later in the twentieth century.

Historian: James A. Jacobs, HABS

Description:

Exterior: The Carter G. Woodson Home National Historic Site (established in 2003) is composed of three contiguous properties that were once identical units in a row of nine houses constructed between 1872 and 1874. The Carter G. Woodson House is located at

No. 1538, the southernmost of the three attached buildings comprising the site. The three-story, three-bay Italianate façade is a common type within the urban residential vernacular of cities throughout the eastern United States. When it was constructed, this form was near the end of its popularity in the District of Columbia.

Laws passed in 1870 and 1871 gave rise to a more varied streetscape in the residential neighborhoods built during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. This new urban pattern developed from a law narrowing the roadbed, creating *defacto* private gardens of varying depths between the sidewalk and the building's lot line. A second law allowed the construction of bays and bows, most commonly, but also other types of projections such as oriels and towers out into this public land. As much a practical outcome (additional square footage) as an aesthetic one for builders and buyers, Kim Hoagland has observed that "by the 1880s, few residential buildings were built without some projection beyond the building line."¹ The restrained Italianate row in the 1500 block of Ninth Street NW, whose continuous façade was located immediately adjacent to the sidewalk, was among the last of its kind in the District.

As is typical for Italianate row house facades, architectural detail is concentrated along the continuous cornice at the top of the row and the frame around the house's front entry. The cornice and door frame, both of wood, are bracketed in a manner typical of the Italianate mode. The front door has four, deeply molded panels, the upper two of which have rounded tops. These architectural embellishments contrast with the otherwise sober elements of the façade: red pressed brick laid-up in a running or stretcher bond and having delicate butter joints; uniformly sized window openings on all three levels fitted with identical two-over-two wood sash; and rectilinear, severely rendered white marble window sills and lintels and a wider, equally simple marble beltcourse running across the façade just above the top of the cellar windows.

The rear of the house has a conventional form with a two-story masonry ell extending far from the three-story main block of the house. A narrow light court is located behind the southernmost bay of the main block between the ell and the one on the adjacent house to the south. The common brick is colored red, but of a lower quality and lacking the crispness of that on the facade. It is laid-up in a common or American bond alternating seven courses of stretchers with one course of headers. A construction seam indicates the place where the ell was extended one room further to the rear (west) than the adjacent properties making up the National Historic Site to the north. The property to the south has also been similarly extended. The north wall of the ell contains no openings. Most of the window and door openings on the west and south walls have been closed with concrete block in an effort to stabilize the failing structure, although the sash survives on the exterior in some places. All of the sash at the rear of the house is believed to originally have been six-over-six

¹ Alison K. Hoagland, "Nineteenth-century Building Regulations in Washington, D.C.," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 52 (1989): 73. This valuable article provided all of the basic information in this essay.

Interior: The house has a slightly more elaborate plan than the usual side-hall arrangement where a straight run of stairs ascends from a point just inside the entry. On the first floor, a long and narrow hallway extends back into the house from the front door and terminates in a stairhall located in the ell between the north party wall and the south wall of the ell. The stairhall is oriented perpendicular to the main hallway and contains an elegant curved stair up to the second floor. Because the straight run of stairs between the second and third floors is located in the usual position along the north party wall of the hallway in the main block, the stairwell for the curved stair rises unimpeded to the level of the second-floor ceiling. Presently filled with concrete block, a second-floor window opening onto the stair from the narrow court formed by the ell once would have given the lofty space an even greater sense of airiness. This feature sets the house apart from many of its peers.

The main block of the house is two rooms deep. The first-floor rooms, once spatially linked by a large opening, were wider because the stair did not have to be accommodated in an enlarged entry hall on the first floor. A third room, believed to originally been the kitchen, was located behind the stairhall in the ell. The room has two windows presently closed with concrete block that formerly opened onto the narrow court. A portion of the room adjacent to the stair has been subdivided into a powder room. The window and door openings in the room at the rear of the ell have been closed with concrete block and the space has been divided into two small rooms by a lightly constructed wall that provides additional structural support for the second floor joists. This room and the one above were part of a two-story addition built in 1880.² A fireplace that likely once contained the stove remains extant on the room's east wall.

On the second floor, a straight run of stairs along the north party wall, above the narrow hallway on the first floor, connects the second and third floors in a wide hallway at the back of the main block. The remainder of the space contains a small room with a window opening onto the narrow rear court. This room has a door opening onto the hallway and also connected to the front room. The room at the front of the main block, extends the house's full width and is its largest.

The second floor of the ell contains two rooms and bathroom. The bathroom and adjacent room are part of the original house. The bathroom window and two windows in the neighboring room open onto the narrow rear court. The rear room, accessed via the original room, was added in 1880 and its two windows have been closed with concrete block. A large closet build-out is located in the southeast corner of this room, but is accessed from a door in the adjacent room.

The main block has a third floor that is two-rooms deep. Unlike the second floor, the area at the front is divided into two unequally sized rooms that are both entered from the hallway. The rear room and the hallway are approximately the same dimensions as on the second floor and similarly contains two entrances one to the hall and one into the

² Beyer Blinder Belle for the U.S. National Park Service, "Carter G. Woodson Home: Historic Structure Report," 15 Jan. 2008, 19.

larger of the front rooms. The rear window in the hallway has been covered over with plywood.

The flooring is tongue-and-groove pine planks with the rooms having random-width boards dating from the original construction and the ones composed of uniform members dating from sometime after 1922. The walls are variously composed of gypsum wall board or plaster affixed directly to the brick walls, to lath attached to the brick walls, or to lath attached to wood studs. The ceilings are finished with plaster board either attached directly to the joists or laid over wood lath having the plaster removed, or are plaster over metal lath.³

Interestingly, the house's door and window architraves seem to have been uniform on all floors of the house—relatively complex and deeply molded design common to Victorian-era houses. In general, molding profiles and architectural embellishment tend to become simpler on each successive floor. The molding in first-floor rooms in the ell are different from the rest of the house, indicating the middle room's initial use as a kitchen and later changes after the 1880 addition. The turned balusters on the main stair and the straight run between the second and third floors are similar with those on the main stair having a slightly more complicated profile.

Only one historic interior door survives on the first floor in the opening from the vestibule into the entry hall. The door has a large, fixed glazed panel on its upper portion contained within a deeply molded frame similar to that embellishing the lower third of the door. Many of the room and closet doors remain extant on the second and third floors, which feature four panels with the two upper panels roughly double the size of the lower.

The first-floor rooms in the main block of the house both have slate fireplace surrounds and mantels faux-grained to resemble marble and are believed to be original. They are similar in size and shape, although the one in the front room is further articulated with decorative incising. Neither of the fireplaces were ever intended for wood or coal fire; rather, they were fitted with decorative iron grills that were the room registers for a passive hot air heating system.⁴ The rooms in the main block above these would have also been heated through grates fitted into the walls without a fireplace surround. These rooms also contained shallow built-in closets built flush with the chases for the flues.

History:

When Dr. Carter G. Woodson purchased No. 1538 Ninth Street NW on August 30, 1922, it had been a boarding house for roughly three decades.⁵ He was the sixth owner, but only the second owner-occupant. Clarinda S. Henkle purchased the newly constructed house in 1874. She lived there for a time with her brother Saul S. Henkle, a general,

³ Beyer Blinder Belle, "Carter G. Woodson Home," 117, 121.

⁴ Beyer Blinder Belle, "Carter G. Woodson Home," 48-49.

⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all information about the owners and occupants of No. 1538 Ninth Street NW is drawn from Beyer Blinder Belle, "Carter G. Woodson Home," 23-27.

former Ohio state senator, and a well-known Washington attorney, and her nephew, Edward A. Henkle. Clarinda Henkle was renting rooms to boarders by 1889 and moved from the house sometime around 1894. Presumably upon Clarinda's death, ownership passed to her nephew Edward and he sold the house early in 1899. Over the next twenty-three years, the house had three owners and it was used primarily as an investment or rental property.

The house was Dr. Woodson's residence and workplace for twenty-eight years from 1922 until his death in 1950. Dr. Woodson had been living in Washington since 1909 and at the time he purchased the house he was confidently embarking on a new chapter of his life in which he could dedicate himself fully to the study of African-American history independent of a college or university. The son of former slaves, Dr. Woodson grew up in Buckingham County, Virginia, where he attended school for portions of the year and augmented this with an unquenchable thirst for learning through additional reading and self-education. This continued after his move to West Virginia where first he worked in coal mines before enrolling in Douglass High School in Huntington from which he graduated in 1897. He went on to earn degrees from Berea College (a bachelor's in 1903), University of Chicago (a second bachelor's and a master's in 1908), and Harvard University (a doctorate in history in 1912, the second awarded to an African American after W.E.B. Du Bois).

At the same time he was pursuing tertiary and graduate degrees, Dr. Woodson held various positions in education, including four years teaching in the Philippines from 1903 to 1907. He traveled for six months on his way back to the United States during which he researched and also studied for a semester at the Sorbonne in Paris. Dr. Woodson relocated to Washington, D.C., in 1909 where he taught in the District's public schools and worked on his dissertation. Throughout the 1910s and 1920s he continued to work in education in the District, including at Howard University, and in West Virginia; however, he increasingly focused his energies toward other endeavors that had the collective goal of expanding awareness and understanding of A history in the United States.

Dr. Woodson's contributions to the study of African-American history and its dissemination were unprecedented and far-reaching and are the reason that his house was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1976.⁶ His work towards this end began in earnest in 1915 with the establishment, in Chicago, of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (later the Association for the Study of African American Life and History or ASALH), the publication of his first book, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*, and the creation, officially on January 1, 1916, of the *Journal of Negro History* (later the *Journal of African American History*). In 1922, with grants from the Carnegie Foundation and the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund in hand, Dr. Woodson began working fulltime for the ASALH and as president of Associated Publishers, Inc.

⁶ Information about the contributions and qualities of Carter G. Woodson's work summarized from Jacqueline Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson: A Life in Black History* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), Chapter Six, "The Father of Negro History."

Dr. Woodson founded Associated Publishers one year earlier as an independent commercial publishing venue for books on African-American history and culture. He purchased the house at 1538 Ninth Street NW to be the headquarters of the ASALH and Associated Publishers (basement and first floor), and his office, library, and living quarters (second and third floors).

Dr. Woodson published numerous books on a range of topics and with numerous viewpoints at a pace, on the rough average, of one per year in the 1920s and early 1930s. In 1937 he founded the *Negro History Bulletin*, which he intended as a means of connecting with non-collegiate educators and more generally to a wider audience. It is still published with a similar mission by the ASALH as the *Black History Bulletin*. Dr. Woodson's desire for greater awareness of African-American history has also been officially observed in the United States each February since 1976 as Black History Month—an outgrowth of “Negro History Week,” which Dr. Woodson established in 1926.

Dr. Woodson's varied efforts to promote and make available African-American history alone are laudable. Yet, his overall outlook and contributions to approaches and methods of scholarly study are just as important. He was groundbreaking in his research on the particular pain and dislocation of the internal slave trade in antebellum America, in the documentation of miscegenation, in chronicling the mental and physical discomfort of day to day life as a slave regardless of where one worked or lived, and recognizing the essential role of churches in sustaining community before and after the Civil War.

Dr. Woodson's work has at times has been unfairly criticized as being too general, lacking editing and polish, not reflecting current scholarship, and selectively using sources. In actuality, his research methods and the sources consulted were similar to white academic historians at the time. The major differences beyond his general subject area was a dedication to using source material documenting the African-American experience first-hand and usually overlooked by other historians—letters, oral history, and other bodies of evidence created by both free and enslaved African Americans. Dr. Woodson focused on gender in a way that made distinctions between how African-American men and African-American women experienced slavery and oppression. Regarding class, he had sympathy for white workers in addition to black workers across time and expressed worry for what appeared to be a lack of strong racial identity and solidarity by upwardly mobile African-American professionals during his lifetime. Whether considering the types of evidence he used or the overlap and interplay of the themes of race, class, and gender, Dr. Woodson employed a multidisciplinary outlook on research and analysis that would not become standard in the field of history until later in the twentieth century.

Dr. Carter G. Woodson can be considered a rare type of pioneering historian whose influence extended to all parts of the production of history—topics, methods, and evidence. He made African-American history accessible and relevant to a broad cross section of readers and, in the early-twenty first century, his accomplishments continue to affect our ever-changing understanding of American history.

Works Consulted:

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Project Information: The recording of the Carter G. Woodson House (Carter G. Woodson Home National Historic Site) was co-sponsored by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), the National Capital Regional Office, the Denver Service Center, and National Capital Parks - East, all of the National Park Service. Support was provided by Alex Romero, Superintendent, and Joy G. Kinard, Ph.D., Central District Manager—both National Capital Parks - East; Perry Wheelock, Associate Regional Director for Resource Stewardship and Science, and Catherine Dewey, Architectural Conservator and Acting Historic Architecture Program Manager—both in the National Capital Regional Office; and Joni Gallegos, Project Manager, Denver Service Center. The documentation was undertaken in 2012-13 by HABS under the direction of Richard O'Connor, Chief of Heritage Documentation Programs, and Catherine C. Lavoie, Chief of HABS. The project leader was Robert R. Arzola. HABS architects Robert R. Arzola and Jason W. McNatt conducted fieldwork and produced the measured drawings. The large-format photography was produced by Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) photographer Jet Lowe. HABS historian James A. Jacobs compiled the short-form history.