

# *Historic Preservation Commission*

*Prince George's County, Maryland*

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## FINDINGS OF FACT, CONCLUSIONS AND DECISION ON THE MARCHE FLORISTS BUILDING (HISTORIC RESOURCE 68-041-03) AND ITS ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING FOR CLASSIFICATION AS A HISTORIC SITE

### **Procedural Background**

The Marché Florists Building was listed as a Historic Resource in the Inventory of Historic Resources associated with the 2010 *Historic Sites and Districts Plan*. The evaluation of the Historic Resource was scheduled for the Historic Preservation Commission's December 17, 2013 agenda, in accordance with Subtitle 29-118, as the result of the submittal of a Prince George's County Building Permit application by the property owner, White Angelica LLC, through its representative Barbara Johnson.

### **Findings**

The Marché Florists Building, 4800 Rhode Island Avenue, Hyattsville (Historic Resource 68-041-03), was surveyed and documented by EHT Tracerics, Inc., in 2009. Based on that documentation, the property was included as a proposed Historic Resource in the September 2009 Staff Draft of the *Historic Sites and Districts Plan* Amendment and in the December 2009 Preliminary *Historic Sites and Districts Plan*. The Prince George's County Planning Board and Prince George's County Council held a Joint Public Hearing on the Historic Sites and Districts Plan on January 19, 2010. All affected property owners and municipalities, among other groups, received written notice of the Joint Public Hearing. No written or spoken testimony was received from the then-owners of the Marché Florists Building, the City of Hyattsville, or any interested parties as part of the record of the Joint Public Hearing regarding the designation for the Marché Florists Building as an Historic Resource. In addition, the District Council did not receive written or spoken testimony from the property owners, the City of Hyattsville or any other interested party about the property before its adoption of the *Approved Historic Sites and Districts Plan* on June 8, 2010. As a result, the property has been included as a Historic Resource in the *Approved Historic Sites and Districts Plan* since June 8, 2010.

The Marché House was identified as a contributing property within the Hyattsville National Register Historic District in 1982 and was designated as a Prince George's County Historic Resource with the 2010 *Approved Historic Sites and Districts Plan*. In 2004, because it was by then more than 50 years old (53) and could be evaluated for contributing status, the Marché Florists Building was evaluated and identified as a contributing property within the Hyattsville National Register Historic District as amended and expanded. The 2004 amendment to the Hyattsville National Register Historic District, which included commercial structures along the U.S. Route 1 Corridor, was funded and administered by the City of Hyattsville Community Development Corporation. The revised nomination was reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission on July 20, 2004; the Historic Preservation Commission's recommendation was forwarded to the County Executive for his concurrence (August 2, 2013). That concurrence was forwarded to the Maryland Historical Trust in compliance with Certified Local Government (CLG) regulations prior to formal listing in the National Register.

The Marché Florists Building was included as an Historic Resource in the Inventory associated with the 2010 *Historic Sites and Districts Plan*. The subject Historic Resource evaluation was scheduled for the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) agenda as the result of the submittal of Prince George's County Building Permit application #37181-2013-CU-00. At the request of Historic Preservation Section staff, the applicant for the building permit also completed a Request for Historic Site Evaluation form for the

subject property on November 10, 2013. The property was posted on December 2, 2013 and the public hearing scheduled for December 17, 2013, according to the provisions of Subtitle 29 (Prince George's County Historic Preservation Ordinance). At the public hearing on December 17, 2013, staff provided a PowerPoint presentation on the property including a description of its architectural character and its historic and cultural significance based on the staff memorandum dated December 10, 2013:

- 1) *Description:* The Marché Florists Building, 4800 Rhode Island Avenue, Hyattsville is a one-and-two-story commercial building of masonry construction built in 1951 and enlarged with two additions completed by 1957. The primary historical focus of the structure is the one-story storefront with large plate glass display windows. Attached to the south end of the storefront is a masonry, metal, and glass greenhouse, accessible from the shop that was part of the first phase of construction. The original storefront (1951), which includes a central entry, is a slightly chamfered projection; the addition to the north (1957) extends the storefront and is slightly recessed from the original block. In addition to elongating the building's presence on the street, the storefront addition to the north provides additional retail space and a secondary single-door entry from the adjacent parking area. The westernmost additions to the building include the two-story office section which begins at the brick chimney on the south side of the original building.

The primary architectural focus of the composition is the storefront/greenhouse element of the building, which is designed for product display and to be readily visible to automobile traffic. The storefront itself is a one-story horizontal composition of large plate glass windows with simple metal frames flanking an all-glass centered double-door entry facing Rhode Island Avenue. The detailing of the original storefront is extended across the addition to the north; this detailing wraps around the northeast corner and extends the storefront and greenhouse as a visual focus of the building. The large plate-glass storefront windows are surmounted by retractable canvas awnings. The storefront portions of the building are sheathed with a random-ashlar cut stone veneer that frames the large display windows; the entire storefront cornice is sheathed in a single color of red-brown brick, which originally served as the background for applied aluminum signage (since removed) facing Rhode Island Avenue. The brick sign panel/cornice and stone storefront below are separated by a simple horizontal metal band cornice which also wraps around the northeast corner of the building. The masonry base of the attached greenhouse is sheathed with the same brick as the storefront; the corners of the greenhouse are sheathed with the same random-ashlar stone used as quoining on the most visible corners of the greenhouse. The greenhouse includes outside entrances; one in a small front-gable projection facing Rhode Island Avenue, the other faces south to Crittenden Street. Both entries have small canted hoods with decorative scroll supports.

The secondary elements of the overall composition include the portions of the storefront further away from Rhode Island Avenue. These areas are executed in painted concrete block and are considerably less detailed than the storefront/greenhouse. Like the more formal portions of the building, the secondary areas also have flat or shallow roofs concealed by simple parapets. The secondary elements of the north elevation include two large windows. Smaller than the storefront plate glass windows, the windows of the north elevation are large enough to provide views of the shop interior, although here the fenestration is separated to include combinations of small panes at the outside edges and larger ones at the center, all fixed, in a balanced arrangement. The two-story office addition that is the westernmost element of the building includes a large multi-light metal window at the first story on the south and smaller multi-light metal windows at the second story in several locations. The eastern "storefront" portion of the building has a flat roof drained with external scuppers and downspouts; the two-story office wing to the west is covered with a shallow west-sloping shed roof concealed on the north, east and south by an undecorated parapet.

- 2) *Setting:* The Marché Florists Building is located within a 0.868-acre parcel on the west side of Rhode Island Avenue at its intersection with Crittenden Street and 42nd Place. The building is located south and east of the Marché House (Historic Site 68-010-62), located at 4200 Crittenden Street. As originally configured, the Marché House and Florists Building were part of the same 3.10-acre parcel used by the Marché family as both a residence and business location. By the late 1930s, the property included the 1932 Marché dwelling, a large greenhouse adjacent to it, and by the late 1930s, a small shop at the Rhode Island Avenue corner. The original small shop was replaced by the current Marché Florists Building in 1951. In 1959 a 0.6204-acre portion of the larger parcel including the florists building was subdivided by Augusta Marché and deeded to her children. This lot was subsequently enlarged to include all commercially zoned property associated with the business and now includes 0.868 acres. The Florists Building is fronted by a stone terrace/podium with low stone retaining walls that lead to the main entrance; the front of the property includes both lawn and plantings that frame the approach to the building. The stone used for the entry features is the same as that used on the building itself, and serves to tie the landscaped front yard to the structure.
  
- 3) *History and Significance:* The Marché Florists Building is the retail component of a significant commercial enterprise in the City of Hyattsville and in Prince George's County. The Florists Building is the commercial face of the Marché family enterprise that began on this site in 1915 and lasted until the mid-1980s. Originally, the Marché's shop was located in downtown Washington, D.C. After the death of firm's founder William Marché in 1919, the company was run by the matriarch of the family, William's widow Augusta. In 1922, Augusta Marché moved retail operations to Hyattsville and it was under Augusta's leadership that both the current Marché House and the Marché Florists Building were built. The company and the buildings are an excellent example and tangible reminder of one of the county's earliest and most successful woman-owned businesses. Under Augusta Marché's leadership and vision, the business would expand and thrive to become one of the most prosperous and well-known florists in Prince George's County.

#### *Marché Property*

Although the property's greenhouses near Decatur Street no longer stand, the Marché family dwelling and its associated mid-century retail structure remain intact and essentially unaltered. Both buildings are significant as the work of an important local architect, John Robie Kennedy. The two buildings should be understood for their relationship to one another, and as a reflection of evolving artistic and architectural tastes from the 1930s to the 1950s. The differences between the Marché House and the Marché Florists Building should be read as conscious aesthetic decisions made by client and architect. The aesthetic and artistic expressions are a reflection of their time, place and concepts of commercial viability. The high-style Colonial/Georgian Revival dwelling, completed in 1932 using Earley Studios technologies, is near the center of the Marché property. In the early years of their operations in Hyattsville, the Marchés maintained a large greenhouse adjacent to their residence. The west wing of the dwelling served as a shop, with refrigeration equipment in the basement. Fire insurance maps indicate that by the late 1930s, the property also included a small frame retail stand at the southeast corner of the property at Rhode Island Avenue.

By 1950, with the success of their retail operations, the Marchés once again relied on the architectural services of family friend John Robie Kennedy to provide them with a commercial building suitable for U.S. Route 1, the bustling commercial corridor of post-World War II Hyattsville. Kennedy's design included a storefront with large display windows and an attached greenhouse; the freestanding building sited at a prominent intersection, displays the tenets of

what is now known as the “Mid-century Modern” style that emphasized streamlined design, (sometimes employing various forms of metals, porcelain panels and large expanses of glass contrasted with rustic and textured materials such as stone, cast stone and brick), roadside visibility, and substantial product display opportunities to attract passing motorists. The stone elements of the Marché Florists Building exterior are used within the showroom as well to frame show windows, define the interior public spaces and blur the traditional distinction between outdoors and indoors. Kennedy’s design is a skilled and successful arrangement of materials and design and the result is a notable local example of the commercial concerns and architectural expression embodied by the Mid-century Modern Style.

#### *John Robie Kennedy and John Earley Studios*

John Robie Kennedy (1881-1966) designed both the Marché House and the Marché Florists Building. A friend of the Marché family, Kennedy had a long and varied practice both in Washington, D.C. and for a time in Raleigh, North Carolina. After completing his education at the University of Alabama and the University of Illinois, Kennedy began his career as a draftsman (1904-1920) in the Office of the Supervising Architect (a department of the U.S. Treasury Department). Following three years in the office of Washington, D.C., architect Frederick B. Pyle, Kennedy became a principal in Wilson, Berryman & Kennedy (1923-1926) in Raleigh. From 1927-1932, Kennedy was employed by the Washington, D.C. firm of Murphy & Olmsted. From 1932-1936, Kennedy returned to the Office of the Supervising Architect, where he designed the Gold Bullion Depository at Fort Knox (completed 1936) before renewing his affiliation with Frederick Murphy (1936-1937). From 1937-1946 Kennedy was employed by the U.S Government’s War Department. Kennedy’s sometime employer, Frederick V. Murphy (1879-1958) was the founder and long-time head of the Catholic University School of Architecture and frequently worked in collaboration with John Joseph Earley (1881-1945) and with his pioneering exposed-aggregate concrete technology. Kennedy’s affiliation with John Joseph Earley and Earley Studios appears to have begun as early as 1927 through his work with Murphy & Olmsted and lasted until John Earley’s death in 1945. Throughout his years in Washington and even while employed by the Federal government, Kennedy undertook private commissions such as his work for John Earley, Augusta Marché and others.

The work of Earley Studios can be found at significant public and private commissions across the United States. Notable applications of the structural and decorative technique can be found at the Bahai Temple, Wilmette, Illinois (designed by Jean-Baptiste Louis Bourgeois [(1856-1930) (Earley Studios involvement began in 1931)], and locally at Meridian Hill Park, a National Historic Landmark (1912-1936, George Burnap. Landscape Architect and Horace Peaslee, Architect); the apse, transept and domes of the Shrine of the Sacred Heart, Washington, D.C. (Murphy & Olmsted, 1922), the entry ceilings at the U.S. Department of Justice (M.B. Medary. Jr., completed 1935). Earley and Kennedy collaborated on a number of institutional and residential commissions in and around Washington, D.C., including the Marché House (J.R. Kennedy and Earley Studios, 1932), a group of “polychrome houses” in Silver Spring, Maryland (1934-1935, Polychrome House No. 1 was designed by Kennedy in 1934 and served as the model for the other four to be completed), and the Dr. M. S. Fealy House, Washington, D.C. (John Robie Kennedy, 1935). Although not associated with Kennedy, the other local notable work by Earley Studios is Peace Cross in Bladensburg (1919-1925).

- 4) *Integrity and Degree of Alteration:* The Marché Florists Building retains a high level of integrity of location, setting, workmanship, feeling, and association by virtue of its largely intact condition. With the exception of the removal of the original aluminum signage at the storefront parapet, all original exterior architectural features and details are intact and in good condition.

The removal of the original signage, likely a function of the cessation of the original use, is not considered to have a negative effect on the overall integrity of the building.

- 5) *Frequency and Scarcity*: The Marché Florists Building is a rare architect-designed, purpose-built, commercial building in Prince George's County constructed in the mid-twentieth century. It is an early and excellent example of a thriving woman-owned business whose success, achievements and taste are manifest in the building complex Augusta Marché created in collaboration with her architect, John Robie Kennedy. Although there are a number of "Mid-century Modern" architect-designed schools and churches in Prince George's County that reflects the county's significant growth in the years after World War II, the Marché Florists Building is the only known architect-designed commercial building from this period.
- 6) In the staff memorandum of December 10, 2013, staff recommended that the Historic Preservation Commission find that the Marché Florists Building and its environmental setting (0.868 acres, Parcel 262, Tax Map 50 Grid B1) be classified as a Prince George's County Historic Site on the basis of five criteria in Subtitle 29-104(a):

*As the retail outlet for an important local, family-owned and woman-owned floral business, the Marché Florists Building exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, political, or historic heritage of the County and its communities (Hyattsville)(1)(A)(iv).*

*As a rare example of an architect-designed commercial building in the county, the design, form and decorative features of the Marché Florists Building embody the distinctive characteristics of the Modern Movement in commercial architecture of the post-World War II period (2)(A)(i).*

*As the work of John Robie Kennedy (1881-1966), an important Washington, D.C. architect, the Marché Florists Building represents the work of a master craftsman, architect or builder (2)(A)(ii).*

*Based on the faceted form of the main block and subservient massing of other elements, the expanses of plate glass anchored by the rustic stone podium, and the sheathing of elongated Roman bricks and ashlar stone veneer, which continues to the interior to meet slabs of black marble and polished travertine, the Marché Florists Building possesses high artistic value (2)(A)(iii).*

*Located on the west side of U.S. Route 1 (Rhode Island Avenue) in Hyattsville, one of the county's principal commercial corridors and the prominent intersection of Rhode Island Avenue, 42nd Place and Crittenden Street, the Marché Florists Building has been an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood since its completion in the 1950s (2)(A)(v).*

7. At the December 17, 2013 hearing, the HPC received testimony from staff regarding the history and architectural and cultural significance of the of the property, received testimony from the applicant's attorney, William Shipp, Esquire, the property owner, White Angelica LLC through its representative Barbara Johnson, and the applicant's architect, Mark McInturff of McInturff Architects. The HPC also acknowledged correspondence received before the public hearing: including 10 letters or emails from individuals, organizations and institutions in support of the proposed designation of the Historic Site and 94 letters or emails from individuals or organizations opposed to the designation.

As part of the public hearing the Historic Preservation Commission received testimony from 19 individuals (other than the applicant team); 18 of these opposed the designation and 1 supported the designation. The Historic Preservation Commission accepted three exhibits: (1) a group of six photographs submitted by the applicant's attorney demonstrating recent conditions at the property; (2) a citizens' petition opposed to the proposed designation; and (3) a letter in support of the designation from Prince George's Heritage, Inc.

### Conclusions and Decision

1. At the public hearing on December 17, 2013, the Historic Preservation Commission reviewed the staff report, the PowerPoint presentation, and the public testimony received before the meeting and the written and public testimony received during the meeting. Commissioner Susan Pruden moved that:

*The Historic Preservation Commission find that the Marché Florists Building should be designated as a Prince George's County Historic Site according to the criteria included in the December 10, 2013 staff report.*

Commissioner Lisa Pfueller Davidson seconded the motion. The motion passed 8-0-1 (Chairman Thompson voted "present").

### Appeals

Under Section 29-119(e)(1-4) of the County's Historic Preservation Ordinance, a decision of the Historic Preservation Commission may be appealed to the District Council if it is filed within thirty (30) days of service of this decision. Such an appeal shall be filed with the Historic Preservation Commission. The Commission would then transmit the appeal to the Zoning Hearing Examiner for a public hearing and recommendation to the District Council for decision.



John Peter Thompson, Chairman

c:: 68-041-03 Historic Resource Evaluation file  
68-041-03 MIHP file

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