



NHL Executive Summary



Name of Property:	Lucy Diggs Slowe & Mary Burrill House
City, State:	Washington, DC
Period of Significance:	1922–1937
NHL Criteria:	Criterion 1: Broad National Patterns Criterion 2: Significant Persons
NHL Theme:	II. Creating Social Institutions and Movements: 2. Reform Movements III. Expressing Cultural Values: 1. Educational and Intellectual Currents
Previous Recognition:	National Register of Historic Places, Individual listing 10/05/2020 (NRIS# 100005324)
National Historic Context:	Megan E. Springate, ed. <i>LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History</i> . Washington, DC: National Park Foundation and National Park Service, 2016.
NHL Significance:	

- The house at 1256 Kearny Street, NE, is significant for its associations with Lucy Diggs Slowe, an African American educator who owned and lived in the house from 1922 until 1937. Slowe served as



the first dean of women at Howard University, where she advocated for educational parity between men and women students and brought the educational theory of student personnel (now known as student affairs) into the network of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), thereby helping to modernize African American higher education. Through her professional connections, speaking engagements, and leadership in several higher education organizations, Slowe's advocacy spread to other HBCUs.

- Slowe helped racially integrate the profession of women's deans by becoming the first African American member of the National Association of Deans of Women, by speaking widely about women's education at both traditionally African American and traditionally European American colleges, and by bringing leading European American educational experts to speak at Howard University.
- Slowe fought an extended battle with the administration of Howard University to be treated equally to male deans, and this effort included the right to live off-campus with her female partner, Mary Burrill. As part of this process, Slowe activated a national network of female educators and Howard alumni to come to her support. Slowe's insistence on gender equality and on her right to privacy concerning her living situation represent an outstanding example of twentieth-century feminism and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) activism.
- The Slowe-Burrill House is also representative of the broad national pattern of female partnership among middle-class women in the early twentieth century. Such partnerships enabled women to enter the professions by allowing them to pool financial and emotional resources and avoid the stigma of a woman living and traveling alone. The commonality of such partnerships in this era created a brief historical moment when middle-class, same-sex female couples escaped public censure; an era that was sunseting as conservative as society began to question the morality and optics of same-sex relationships. While representative of this historical pattern, the Slowe-Burrill House is distinctive for its associations with an African American female couple. Most known partnerships of this kind were between European American women.

Integrity:

- While the house has been modified for continuous use as a residence, and modifications have removed some elements that were in place during Slowe and Burrill's occupancy and ownership, the lack of other sites with strong associations with Slowe makes its integrity high relative to comparable properties.
- The Slowe-Burrill House maintains its orientation, main entrance location, building footprint, exterior cladding, and design features, including decorative shingles and the porch details.
- The dining room, living room (parlor), and two front bedrooms all retain their historic material, including wood floors, decorative trim with bull's-eye molding, and plaster walls. Bay windows in the dining room and in front bedroom remain. The living room features a fireplace mentioned by Slowe in her letters.
- Since the period of significance, the main changes to the house have been an extension of the kitchen in the rear of the house and of the rear bedroom above it; a reconfiguration of the stairwell; and the enclosure and small extension of the entry stoop at the main entrance. Most of the windows have been replaced, but the replacements continue to be operable double-hung sash, as they were historically.
- Despite these changes, the overall integrity of the property remains high. The primary public areas of the house (living room/parlor and dining room) retain the bulk of their design elements and materials from the period of significance.



- The house continues to effectively evoke its associations with Lucy Diggs Slowe and her partnership with Mary Burrill by reflecting the characteristics of a middle-class home of the 1920s and 1930s.

Owner of Property: Benjamin C. O’Connell and Dawn C. Myer-O’Connell

Acreage of Property: 0.17

Origins of Nomination:

National Park Service, National Capital Region (NPS, NCR). In 2017, NCR concluded a limited NHL site identification study for potential LGBTQ-related properties to be designated in the region. This was one of the first sites identified for NHL designation. NPS partnered with the Organization of American Historians (OAH) to complete this study.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

The owners are supportive of the designation. The city is pursuing recognition of other LGBTQ-related sites, and this designation will help highlight the importance of that history. NPS and OAH have done outreach to the national board of the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority (which Slowe cofounded), the history department of Howard University, the DC State Historic Preservation Office, and the DC Preservation League. In addition, NPS and OAH made presentations at the DC History Conference and Howard University regarding the study. All parties consulted have been supportive of the nomination.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: None known.

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of August 20, 2024):

- David Maloney, State Historic Preservation Officer, DC Historic Preservation Office
- Ben & Dawn O’Connell, Owners, 1256 Kearny St, NE (Slowe-Burrill House)
- Zachary Burt, Community Outreach and Grants Manager, DC Preservation League

Landmarks Committee Comments:

- Revise the statement that Slowe’s fight for the right to live off campus foreshadows the homophile movement.
- Strengthen references to the radicalism of the homophile movement and to its relationship to privacy concerns.
- Add mention of Linda Perkins, *To Advance the Race: Black Women's Higher Education from the Antebellum Era to the 1960s*, published in April 2024.
- Clarify that the “female campus” at Howard University is not among the buildings within the National Historic Landmark at Howard University.

Landmarks Committee Recommendation:

The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior designation of the Lucy Diggs Slowe & Mary Burrill House in Washington, DC, as a National Historic Landmark with any additions and corrections as noted by the Committee being made prior to the nomination being forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for action.

Advisory Board Recommendation: